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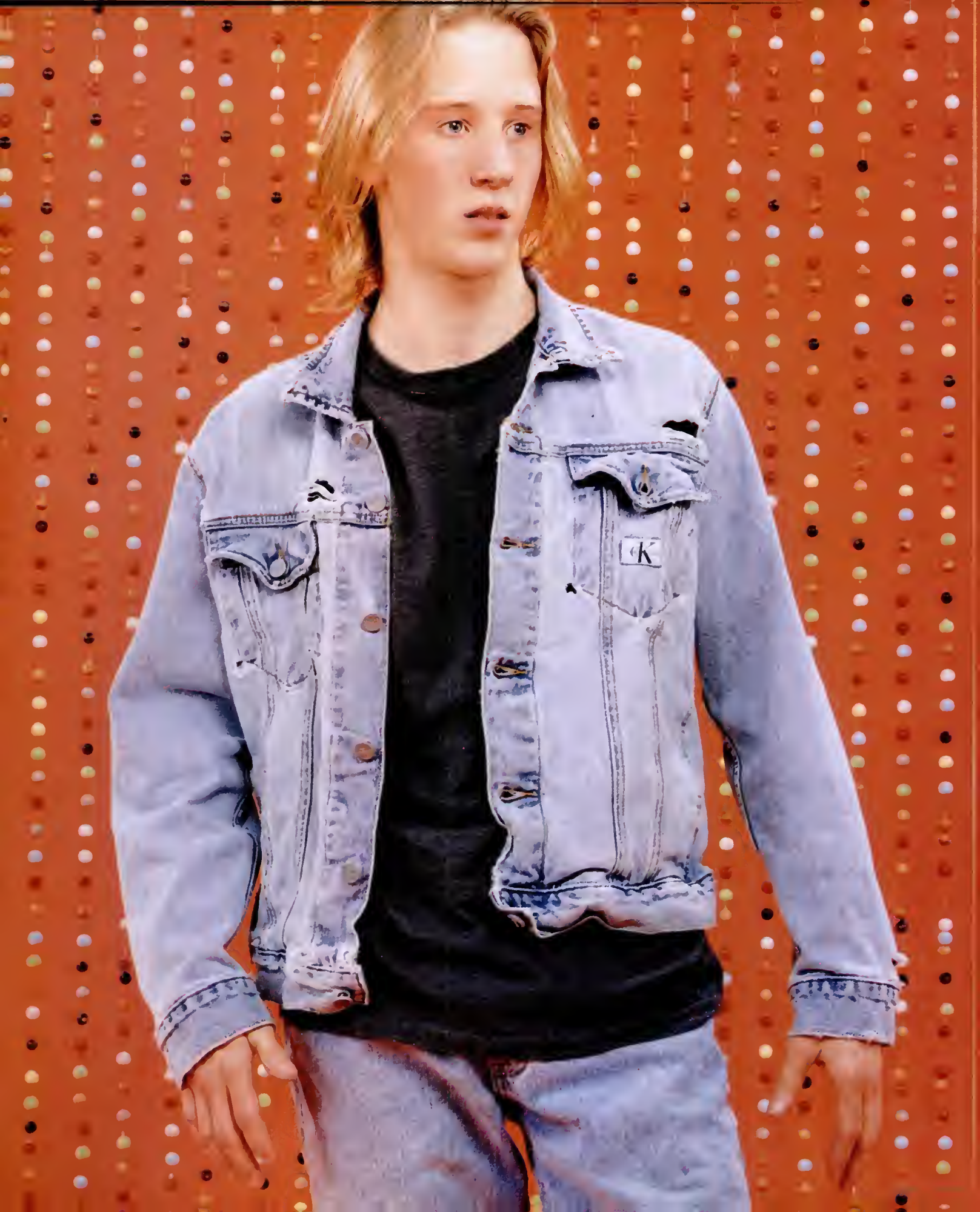
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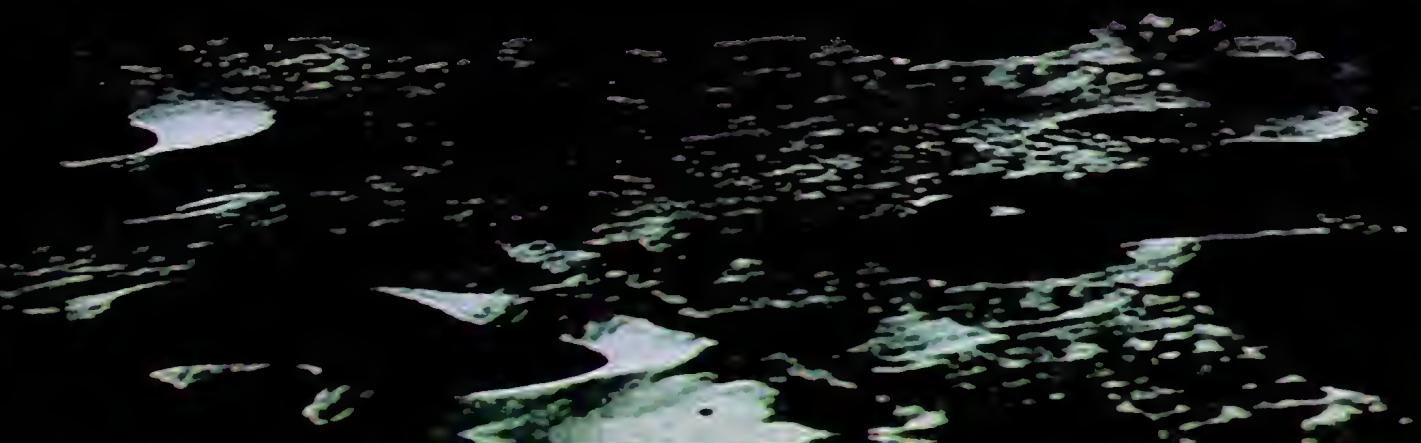
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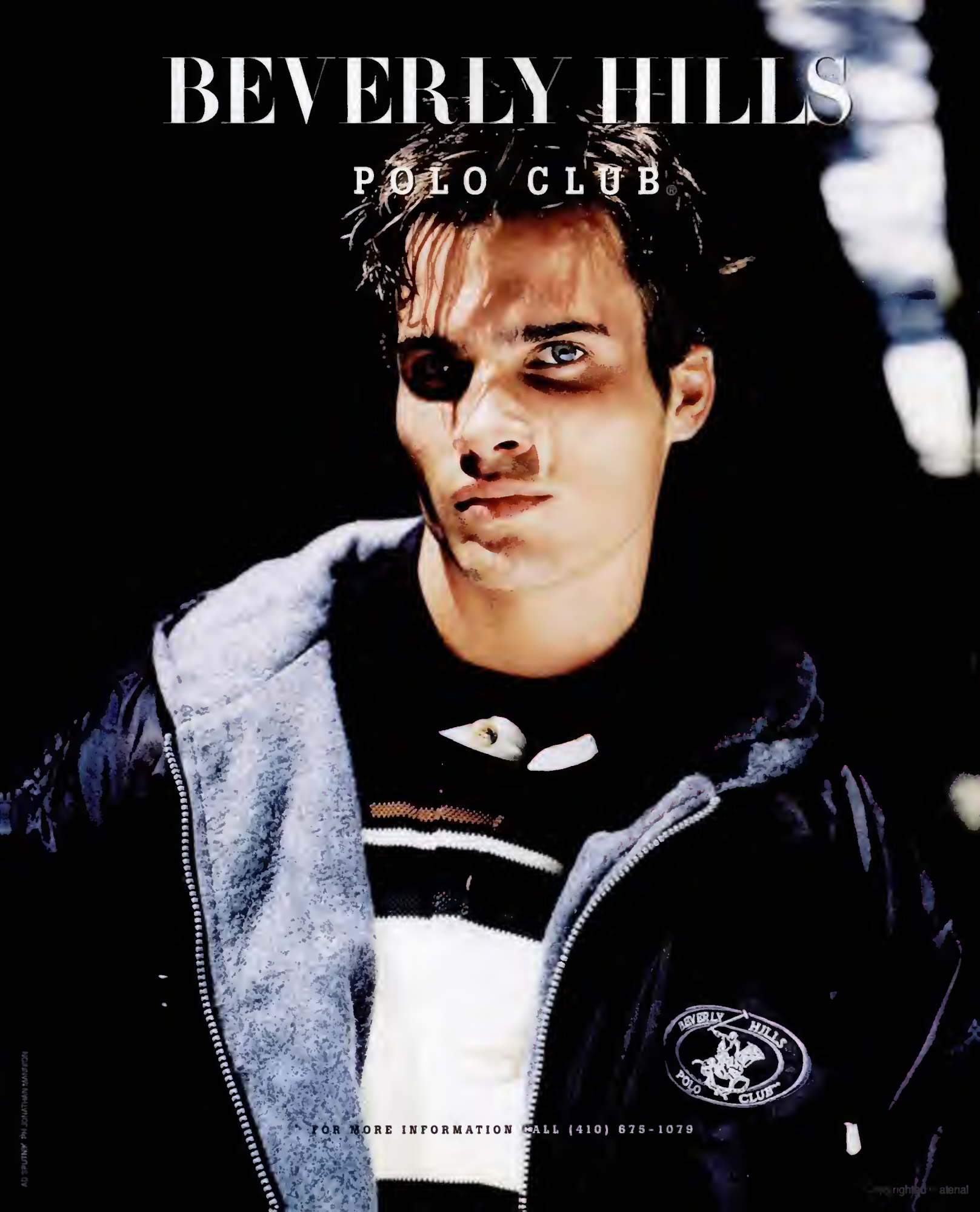
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FEATURES

DECEMBER 1996/JANUARY 1997 • VOLUME 4, NUMBER 10

90 LAST MAN STANDING
After Dr. Dre's departure and Tupac's murder, the Death Row empire may be crumbling. With two-thirds of the label's greatest assets gone, Snoop Doggy Dogg's got his work cut out for him. *By Ronin Ro. Photographs by Philippe McClelland*

98 OOB, LA, LA
Hip hop Renaissance woman Queen Latifah prepares to *Set It Off* with her bold role as a lesbian bank robber in F. Gary Gray's new film. The MC/TV star/label exec reveals the secrets behind her career choices and answers the question, Is she or isn't she? *By Danyel Smith. Photographs by Jon Ragel*

106 CLIP: KEITH MURRAY
Murray's raw, entertaining battle rhymes are showcased on his second album, *Enigma*. Murray describes—in uniquely metaphorical terms—the thrill of writing such lines. *By Chairman Mao. Photograph by Daniel Hastings*

114 REWIND '80
VIBE looks back at the trends and triumphs in music, fashion, and sports in the nine-six.

118 MISSION ACCOMPLISHED
The Isley Brothers have stormed back with *Mission to Please*, their first hit album in 13 years. And the R&B/soul/funk gods weren't above enlisting the services of some young whippersnappers to kick-start their vintage engine. *By Michael Eric Dyson. Photographs by Dah Len*

124 CLIP: E-40
The "Yay Area" rapper, along with his Click crew, made his money the old-fashioned way—he earned it. *By Jazzbo. Photograph by Daniel Hastings*

126 GOT TO GIVE IT UP
With Aaliyah's sophomore effort, *One in a Million*, the sultry teenager sets out to prove she's more than just a protégée of the man who she maintains is *not her husband*—R. Kelly. *By kris ex. Photographs by Robert Paul Maxwell*

130 OBSERVATION BOGO
On the Navajo reservation in northeast Arizona, the elders say the earth must be filled with bones and bullets. Why else would their sons be arming themselves, wearing gang colors and killing one another? *By Kathy Dobie. Photographs by Dana Lixenberg*



ON THE COVER
Snoop Doggy Dogg photographed by Philippe McClelland/Visages

ABOVE
Björk photographed by Barron Claiborne; styling by Emil Wilbekin; makeup by Shadé for Face Stockholm/A Bantu; hair by Chuck Amos; red fleece sweater by Esprit; black nylon/Lycra skirt by 2B!; see the Details

Pete Uller likes all the helmet room in the 1997 Saturn SC2.



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108 VIBESTYLE: CRAZY BEATS
A fashion expedition into trip hop territory with Björk, Goldie, DJ Spooky, and Everything but the Girl.
Photographs by Barron Claiborne. Styling by Emil Wilbekin

140 VIBEFASHION: LEGENDS ON THE VINE
Kansas City in the '30s was the epicenter of jazz. With sharp suits and striking silhouettes, K.C. jazz legends return home to historic 18th and Vine. *Photographs by William Claxton. Styling by Derick Procope*

150 VIBESTYLE: HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE
Plus: Designer Mark Echō. Magic Inc.

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LEFT: Navajo gangbanger photographed by Dana Lixenberg

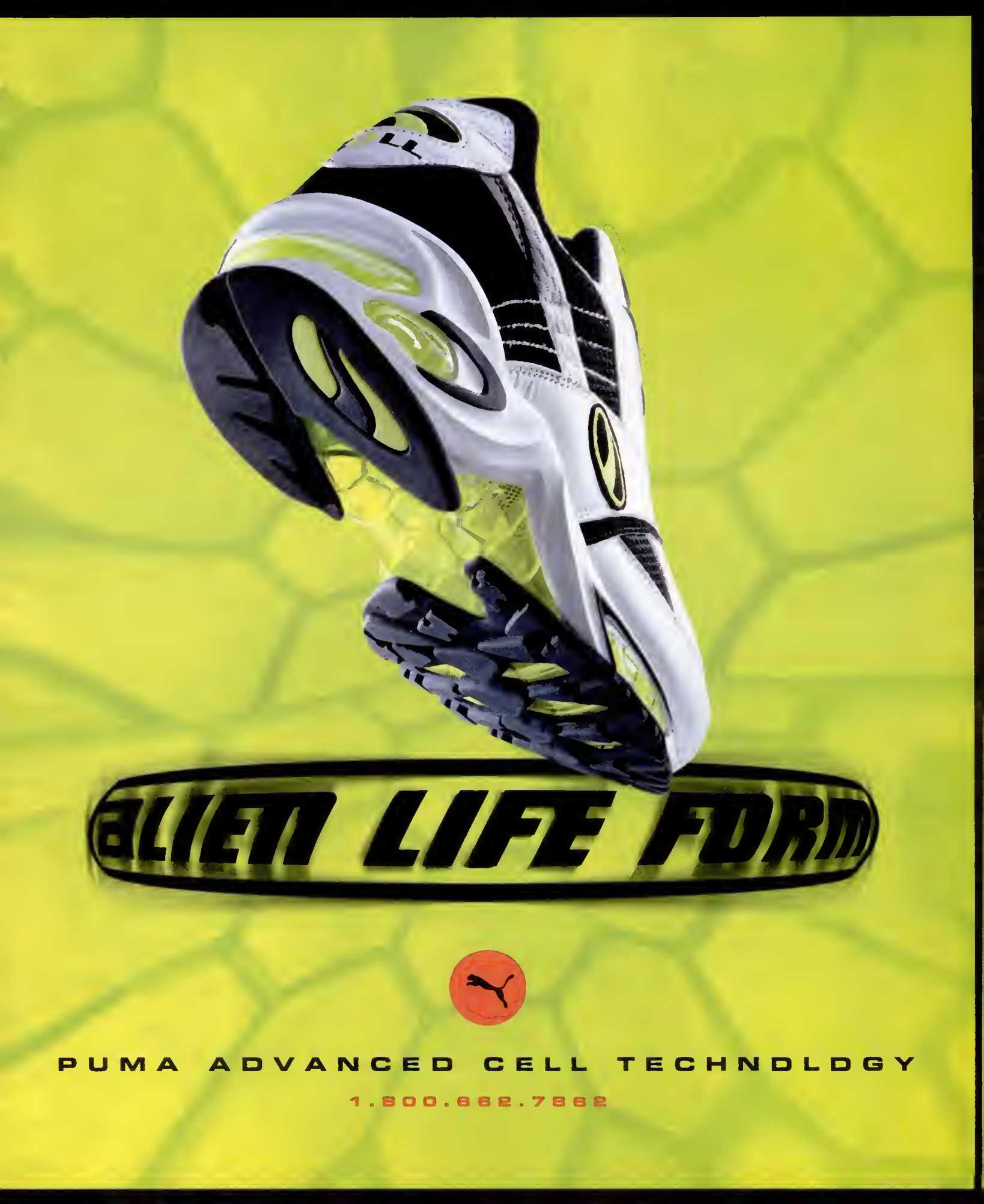
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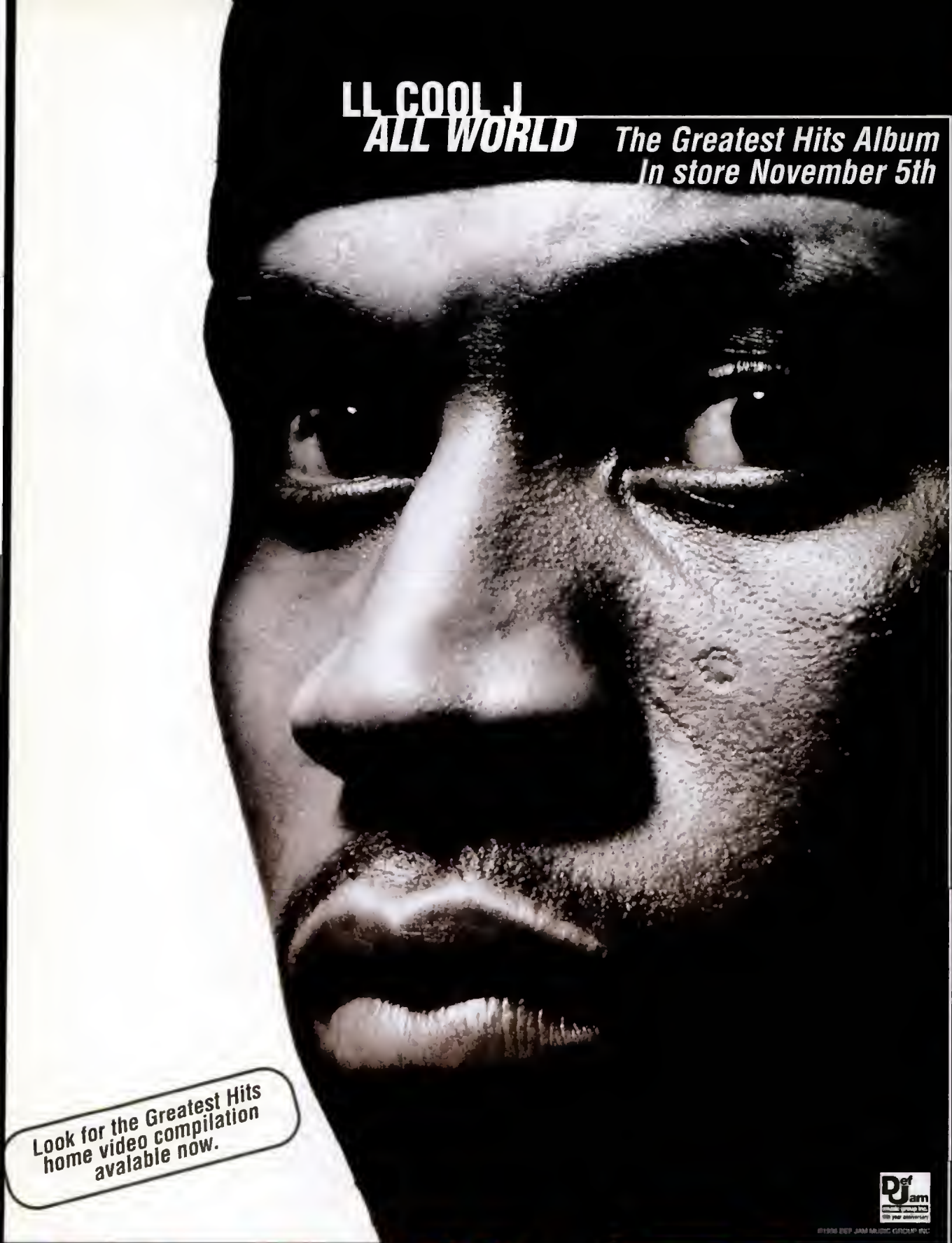
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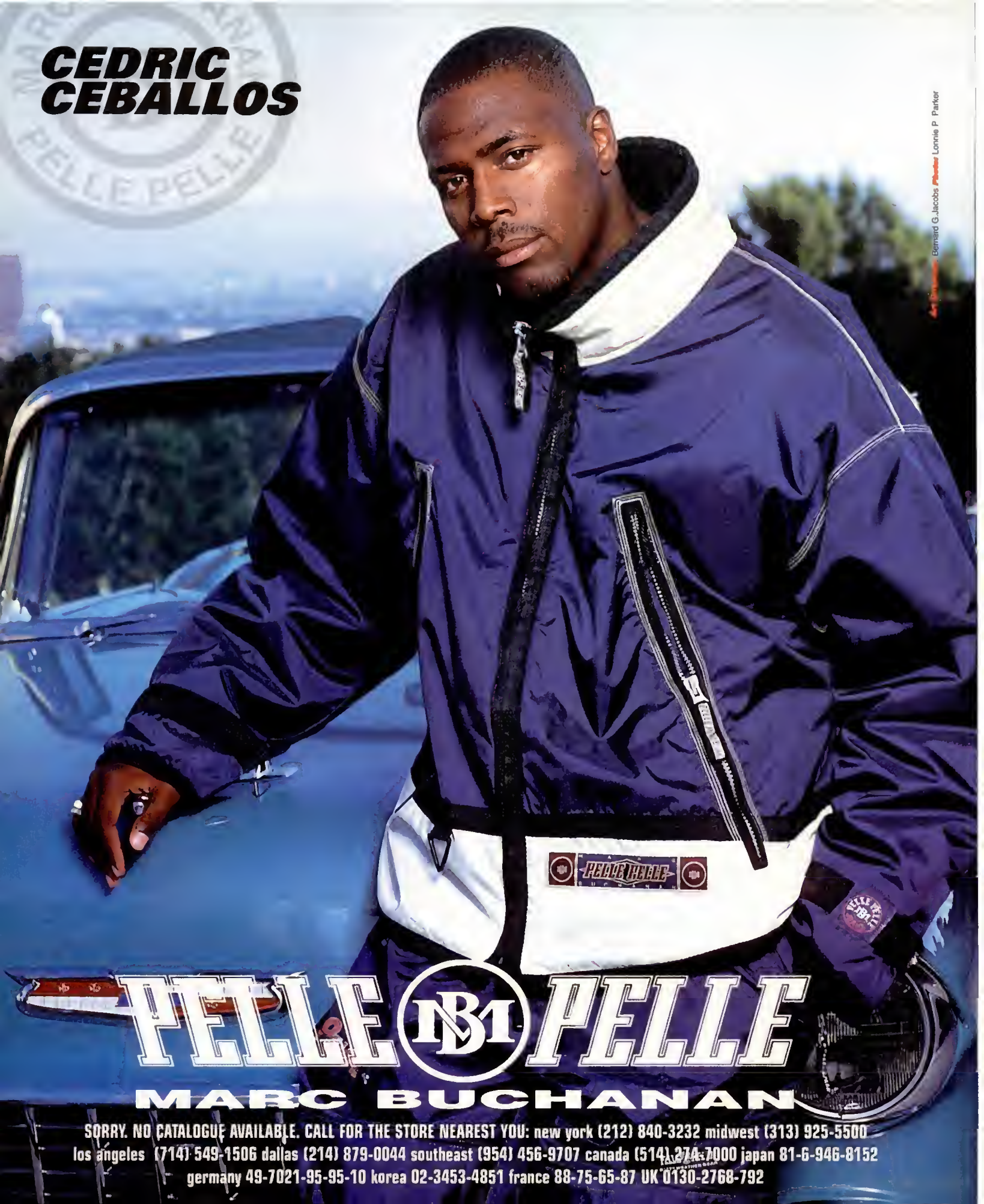
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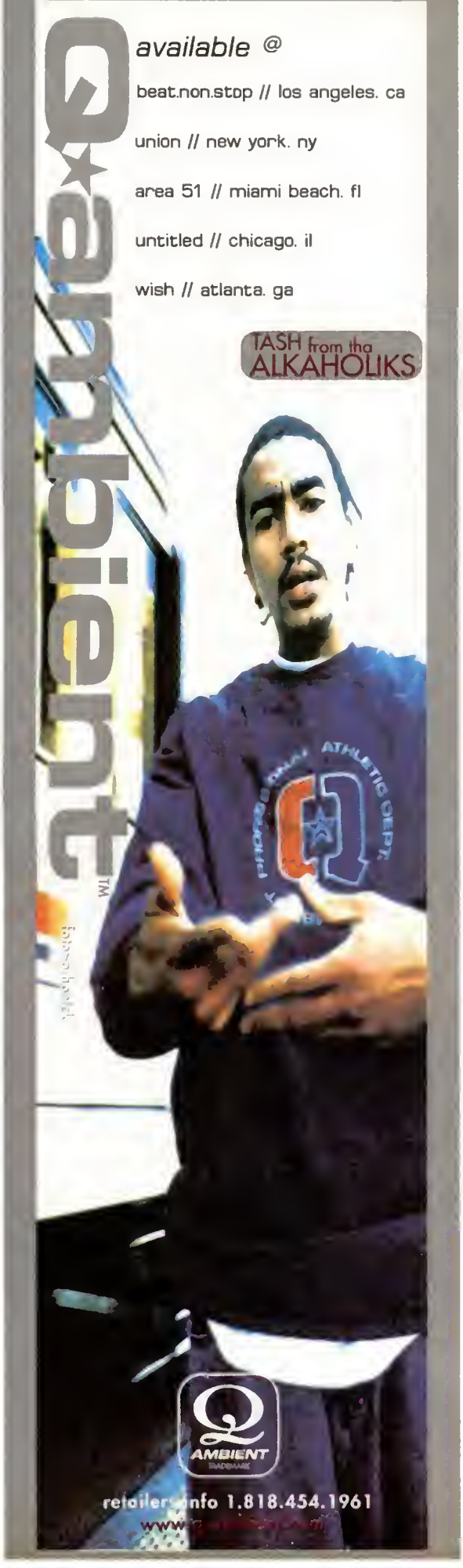
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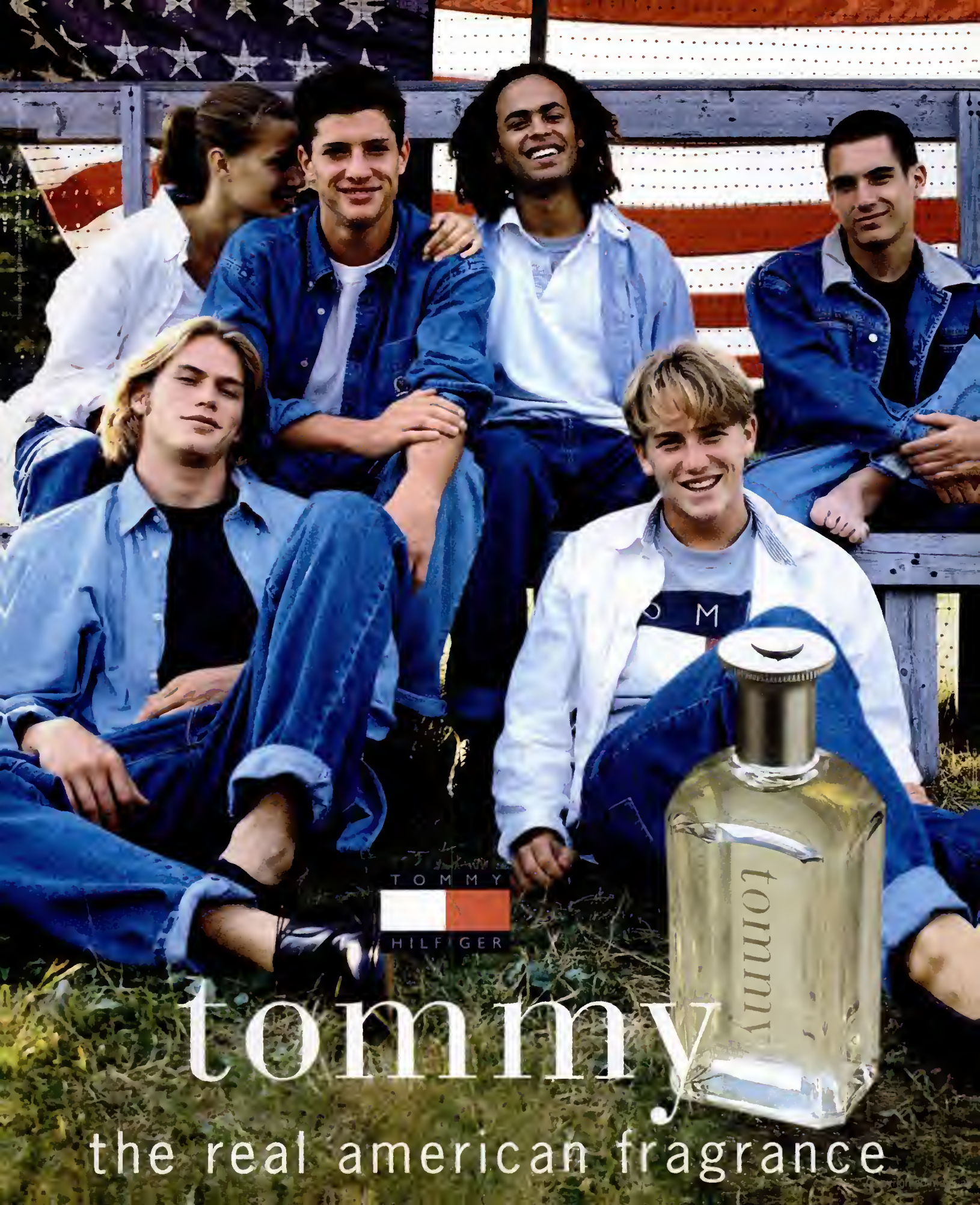
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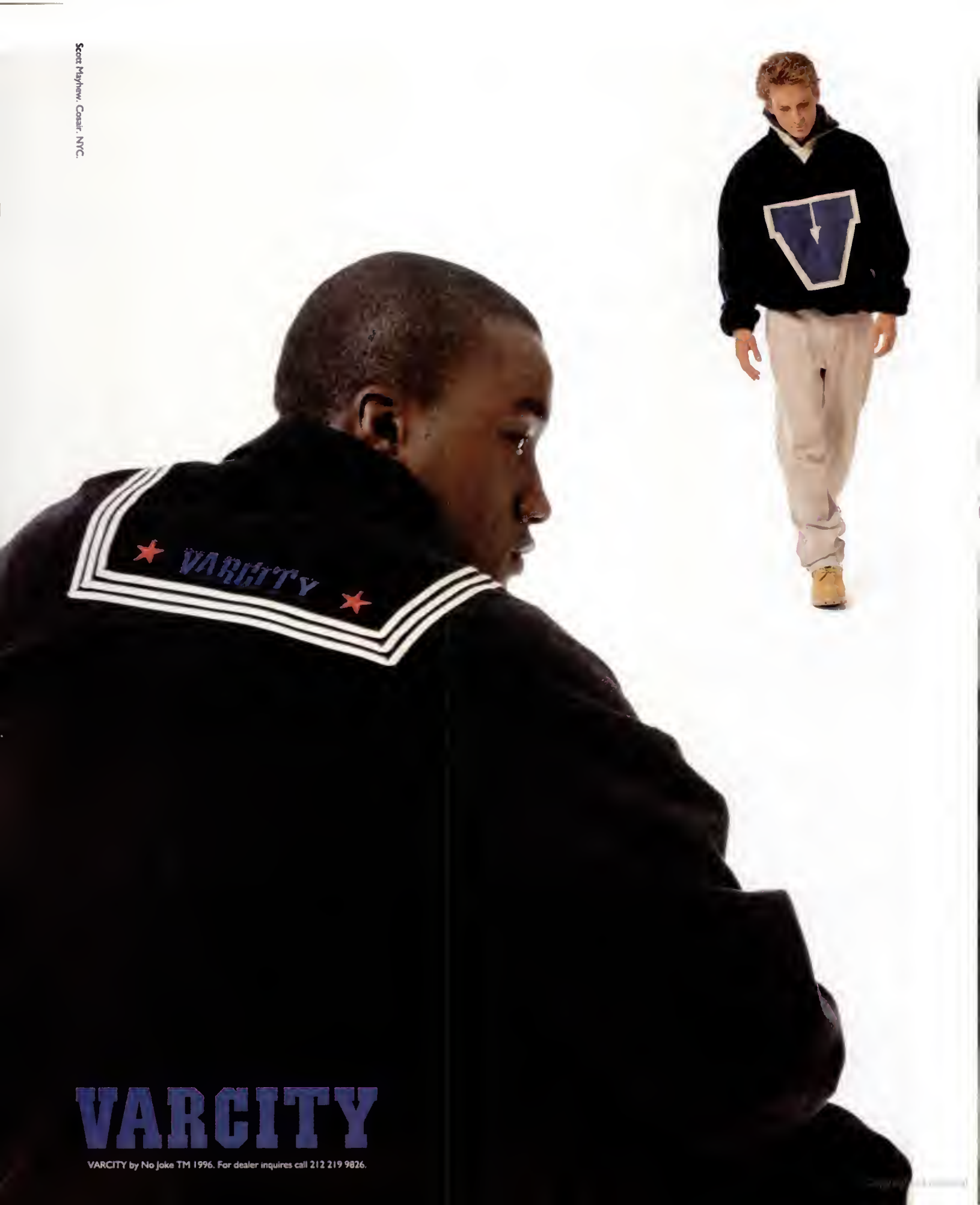
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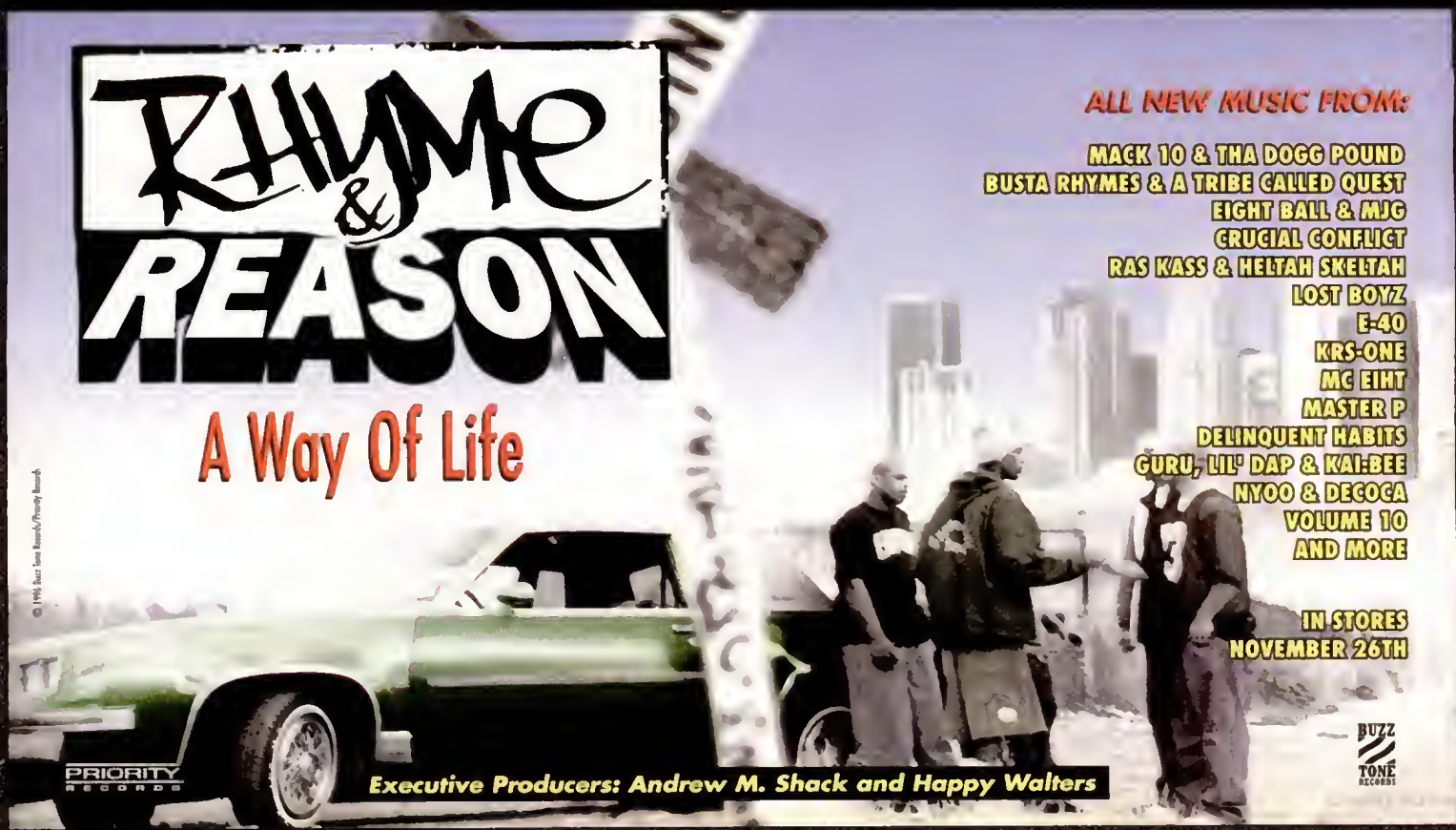
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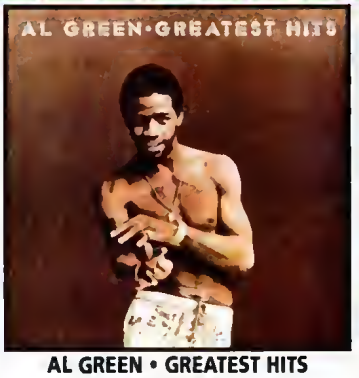
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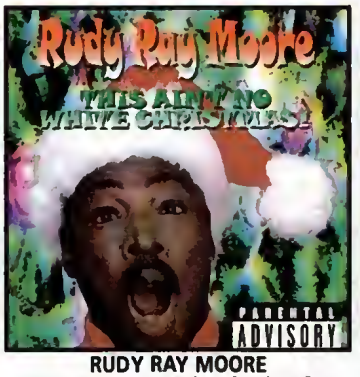
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163 **M.O.P.**
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164 **Mo Thugs Family (Featuring Bone)**
Mo Thugs Family Scriptures
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165 **Johnny Gill**
Let's Get The Mood Right
Motown

166 **New Edition**
Home Again
MCA Records

167 **Various Artists**
Sugarhill Records Story
Rhino Records

168 **Various Artists**
Rhyme & Reason
Original Motion Picture Soundtrack
Priority Records

169 **Jeru The Damaja**
Wrath Of The Math
Payday/Island

170 **Dru Hill**
Dru Hill
University/Island Black Music

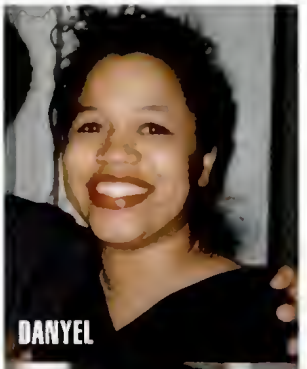
171 **Various Artists**
Strictly The Best
VP Records

172 **Reign**
Indestructible
H.O.L.A. Recordings

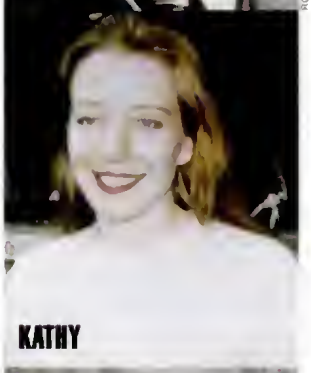
173 **Various Artists**
Classic Jazz Funk Volume 2
MVP Records

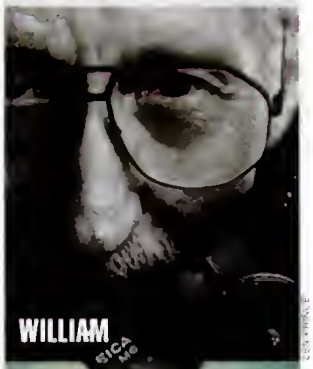
174 **Rudy Ray Moore**
This Ain't No White Christmas
The Right Stuff Records













CONTRIBUTORS

Danyel Smith

VIBE editor-at-large Danyel Smith spoke to Queen Latifah ("Ooh, La, La," page 98) about life, love, and her new movie, *Set It Off*. "Latifah has always been careful to be a positive role model," says Smith. "It was brave of her to take the controversial part of a lesbian bank robber. Audiences will see that there's more to Latifah than meets the eye." Smith was recently awarded a National Arts Journalism Program fellowship from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, where she will be in residence for the 1996–97 academic year.

Michael Eric Dyson

Michael Eric Dyson, a professor of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina, wrote about the comeback of the legendary Isley Brothers ("Mission Accomplished," page 118). Dyson attributes the group's staying power to its ability to continually evolve musically. "They're willing to learn from people much younger and much less accomplished than themselves," Dyson says. "I was also impressed with how spiritual the Isleys are. It gives them personal stability that's not often found in the music industry." Dyson's third book, a collection of essays titled *Race Rules: Navigating the Color Line*, was recently published by Addison-Wesley.

Kathy Dobie

VIBE writer-at-large Kathy Dobie examines the urban-style street gangs that are becoming prevalent on Navajo reservations ("Reservation Dogs," page 130). "Native Americans are invisible culturally," Dobie says. "I want people to see beyond the myths—to see what really matters to 20-year-old Navajo boys. They deserve visibility and respect." Dobie has contributed to *Harper's*, The *Village Voice*, and *Vogue*. Her recent memoir in *Harper's* chronicling her high school sexuality has been optioned by Dial Press.

William Claxton

World-renowned jazz photographer William Claxton was in his element shooting this month's fashion spread ("Legends on the Vine," page 140) around Kansas City's legendary jazz haunts. "I was making models out of musicians without removing natural beauty," says Claxton. "I had an excellent rapport with the musicians, and they conveyed a sense of dignity." Claxton has contributed to *Vanity Fair*, *Interview*, and *GQ*; he's had two books published: *Claxography: The Art of Jazz Photography* and *Jazz—William Claxton*."

Barron Claiborne

Barron Claiborne shot this month's VIBE Style story, "Crazy Beats," (page 108) of trip hop–influenced artists DJ Spooky, Goldie, Björk, and Everything but the Girl. The 29-year-old Boston native, who began taking pictures when he was only 10, found this shoot to be especially hassle free. "Everyone was very cool and the entire shoot was beautiful," he says. Claiborne's work has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Newsweek*, and *NY Press*.

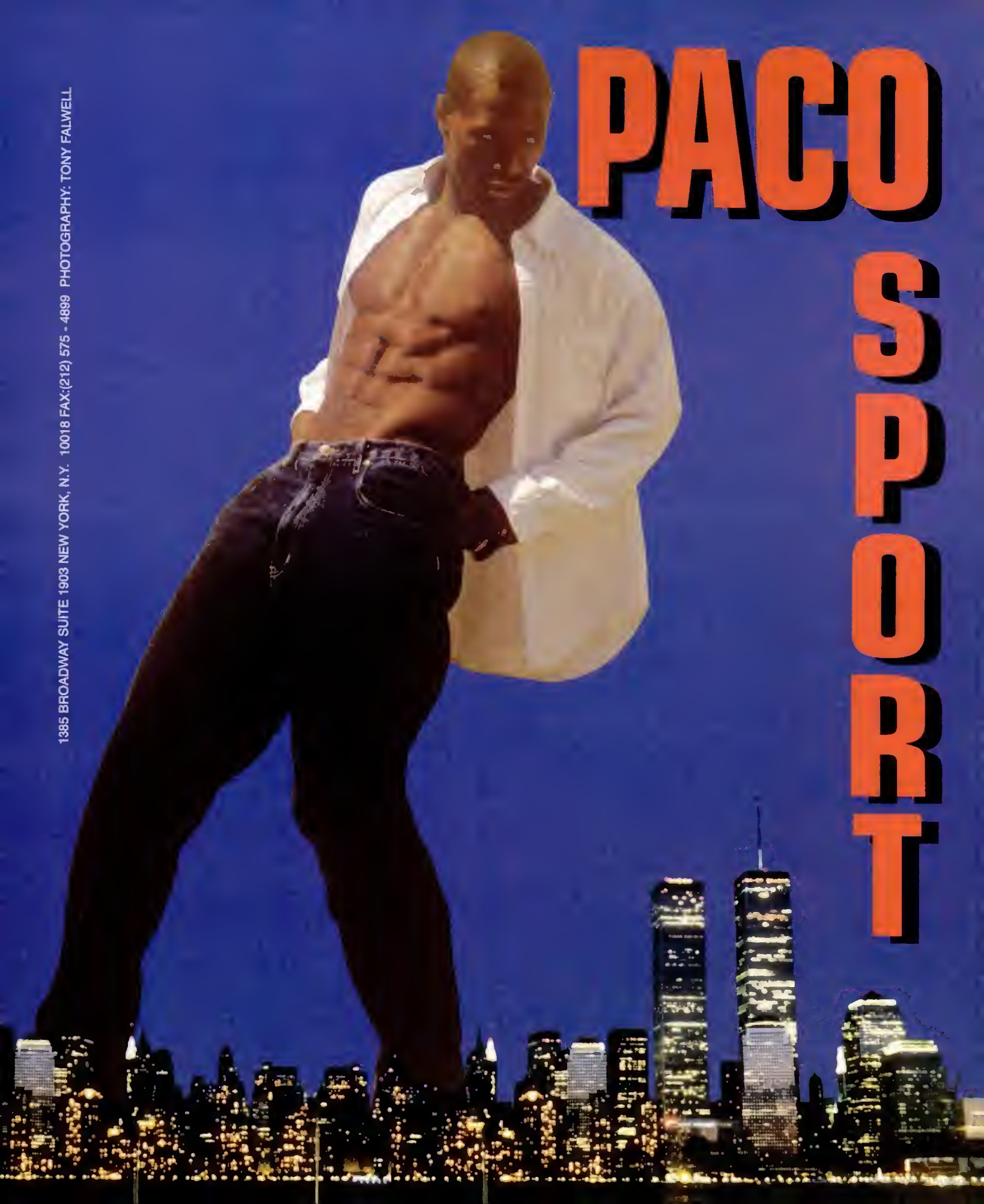
London dweller **Neil Gaiman** wrote this month's apocalyptic Start opener, "Waiting for the End of the World" (page 52). Gaiman is the creator of the award-winning *Sandman*, a graphic comic-book series published by Vertigo....**Philippe McClelland** shot Snoop Doggy Dogg for the cover story ("Last Man Standing," page 90). He has photographed such entertainers as James Brown, Brandon Lee, and Seal, and has contributed to *The Face*....Freelance writer **Tony Green** wrote about Do Or Die in Next (page 84). Green writes for the *Florida Times-Union*, and has also contributed to *Option*, *Spin*, and *Essence*....**Ronin Ro**, who wrote October's cover story on Dr. Dre, adds another cover to his VIBE résumé with this month's feature on Snoop. His collection of essays titled *Gangsta* is published by St. Martin's Press....**Darius James**'s new column, Dr. Snakeskin's Home Video Views, (page 156) debuts in our new Film section in VIBE arts. James is the author of *That's Blaxploitation! Roots of the Baadasssss 'Tude*....**Dana Lixenberg** photographed "Reservation Dogs." A regular contributor to the magazine, Lixenberg shot the September cover of the Notorious B.I.G. and Puffy Combs.

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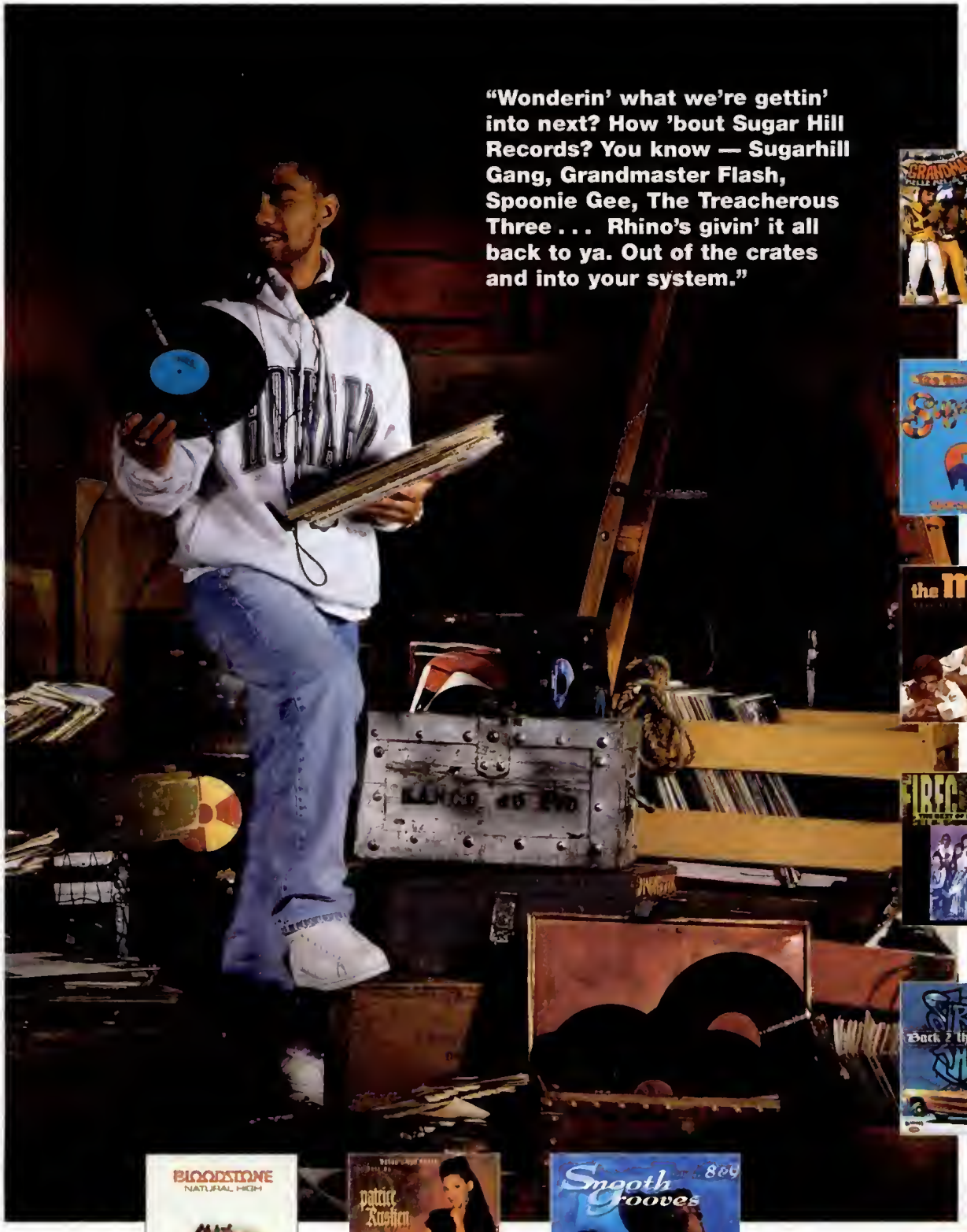


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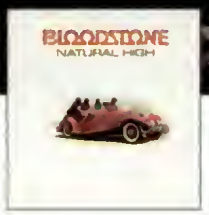
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MAIL

TUPAC R.I.P.

Immediately following the untimely death of Tupac Shakur, VIBE received hundreds of letters and poems from readers expressing their profound grief and overwhelming sense of loss. Following are some of those letters.

After hearing about Tupac's death, I was deeply saddened, surprised, and angry all at the same time. It's a shame that another talented, young black man had to die over stupidity. I have nothing but love for Tupac and will truly miss him.

Angel
Miami, FL

Now that I think about it, I miss seeing Tupac's face on MTV News every week. I miss hearing all the rumors. I miss *him*. I always pictured him being on the cover of VIBE in 50 years talking about the good ol' days. He had so many dreams that will never come to pass because murderers took them away from him, his family, and his fans.

F.M.K.
Pittsburg, PA

I never realized how much Tupac's death would affect me. Before he died, I used to tell people I didn't like him because he ran his mouth too much. Now I have a heavy heart that doesn't seem to go away. I have to look past "[t]hug [l]ife" and appreciate all the good he did. Despite all the media claim, in my heart I know that Tupac was not a gangster. He was without question a good man who hadn't even begun to reach his full potential.

Dana
Bronx, NY

I'm still in denial about Tupac's murder. Listening to his music and reading his interviews made you feel like you really know him. Therefore, all of his fans are experiencing a great loss. There go my plans to marry him once I'd turned 18 years old!

Tara Davis
Lakeville, MN

Tupac's death was untimely yet unsurprising. I teach social studies to troubled teens at a high school, and I believe there is much to be learned from his experiences. This type of violence is happening every day on the streets of every U.S. city. I now teach my lessons with Tupac in mind. I don't want any of my students to end up on the other side. Not yet. They are far too young.

Eric Waters
elw126@psu.edu

The unnecessary death of Tupac under dubious circumstances further underlines all that is wrong with the Hip Hop Nation today. Record companies who state in public that they do not condone gangsterism and the artificial regionalism so prevalent in the music today, but then hypocritically continue to promote this genocidal warfare on wax, must be held responsible for perpetuating this cycle of violence. The slave ship didn't bring East or West Coast niggas to the Americas. Like the slave master, these record companies are making C.R.E.A.M. off our blood.

Mesfin Aman
Toronto, Canada

Upon hearing of Tupac's death, my entire body went numb, and then I cried. I dreamt about Tupac the night before and thought I should send an encouraging note to the hospital telling him to hold on, but I never got the chance. He was a very energetic person who never bit his tongue, and for that we should all give him credit. I remember one of his most memorable quotes which went something like, "If I'm wrong for the things I say and need to be checked, I'm still young. God will check me."

Jennifer Hopkins
Newark, DE

"The media portrayed Tupac as a thug, but we need to focus on the good he did, like feeding single mothers on Mother's Day or handing out turkeys on Thanksgiving."

Of course, I didn't know Tupac personally, but I am still feeling pain over his death. The media are portraying him as a thug, but he was much more than that: Gangsters don't write poems reaching out to single mothers such as myself encouraging them to keep their heads up. Tupac was a conflicted child, and had he been given the time to grow old, he would have become an even greater man. We all need to focus on the good things he did in his life, such as feeding single mothers on Mother's Day or handing out turkey baskets on Thanksgiving.

Karen Mills
KAYC918@aol.com

On our campus in Roma, Lesotho, South Africa, students have shed many tears over the death of Tupac. We will hold a memorial for him at which all of his fans will sport their bandannas tied in true Tupac fashion. You will be missed, homeboy.

Kukubo Biketi
biketi@econ.nul.ls

Tupac came a very long way in his short life, and people should at least acknowledge that. He was not a bad person out to do the world harm but, rather, a fun-loving person simply trying to be himself. Those who couldn't see past "[t]hug [l]ife" never saw the intelligence and charisma that was so much a part of who Tupac was. I am holding his family and friends in my prayers.

TRB
Atlanta, GA

I am outraged at the media coverage of Tupac Shakur's homicide. Everyone seems to be focusing on the negativity in Tupac's life rather than exposing the many positive things he contributed to our society. Tupac was a role model to many aside from being a talented actor, brilliant rapper, sex symbol, and leader. Although he was surrounded by a very harsh, violent environment and frequently spoke of it, he was merely reporting on what our society has unfortunately become.

Bright Moon
Peace Dale, R.I.



YOUR BEST SHOT — MICHAEL WILLIAMS, DARWEN, LANCASHIRE, U.K.

Lorraine Johnson heard from her daughter in Detroit EVERY DAY this week, but they haven't SPOKEN in days.



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I am very sad about the passing of Tupac because he was such a young man with so much spirit. But like the old saying goes: Live by the gun, die by the gun. I'm sick of hearing the excuse that his lyrics were a reflection of his tough reality. With as much money as he had, he must have enjoyed his life. I'm sorry to see him go, but maybe something positive can come out of this tragedy.

Ronny
via E-mail

I know Tupac was no angel, but it seems like everything I read about him in London focuses on violence and the sexual-assault case. I was extremely saddened by his death, and I hope people don't forget the most important thing: he was an extremely talented artist!

Dionne
London, England

I don't feel sad about losing Tupac, because I'm a true "[t]hug-[l]ife" outlaw and he always told the true ones not to cry for him when he's gone. Although I feel like I lost a comrade, his words are still embedded in my mental, and he will always be here with me spiritually. "Thug Life" lives on!

White Owl
Coxsakie, NY

MAKE MY DRE

I was truly inspired by the article about Dr. Dre ["Escape From Death Row," by Ronin Ro, October]. He's definitely intelligent, talented, and, most importantly, a positive role model for the hip hop community. I'm very happy to learn that he started his own label, Aftermath Entertainment, and is determined to redefine urban music. With all of his hard work and dedication, I have no doubt that he's gonna succeed in making new superstars.

Tina K.
Glendale, CA

There is no denying Dre's extraordinary talent, courage, and business savvy. His rare ability to take public stands on unpopular issues and to take risks in his career without fear of being ostracized by the hip hop community is inspiring.

M. Le Flore
Colton, CA

Dr. Dre is such a hypocritical joke! I wonder why he didn't mention the way he finally got released from Ruthless Records. He wants everyone to believe he's so positive, but when he and Suge Knight went to see Eazy-E about releasing Dre from his contract, it was a different story. It's like the old saying: You can take the dog out of the street, but you can't take the street out of the dog. As far as I'm concerned, Dr. Dre gets not respect.

Linda Kelly
Miami, FL

Without Dre, Death Row would have been nothing. From Niggas With Attitude to Death Row to Aftermath Entertainment—wherever Dre goes, hip hop goes. I'm glad Dre realizes that it's his turn to take charge and stand alone.

Nate Seven
Seattle, WA

For the longest time I've been wondering what happened to *real* hip hop artists like Run-D.M.C. and Eric B and Rakim. Dre's bringing these legendary rappers back into the studio is the *second*-best thing he's done; the first was leaving Death Row!

Liz Smith
Philadelphia, PA

RADIO DAZE

The story on black radio ["Radio Activity," by Charisse Jones, October] was great. I am a die-hard hip hop fan, but first and foremost I'm a music fan. I may be black, but if something's good I'm going to listen—and that includes rock and alternative. Urban radio has become repetitious and needs more variety in its programming. Seal's "Kiss From a Rose" was the absolute bomb last year, and even though some of my real hardcore friends were checking for it, they couldn't hear it on their favorite urban stations.

Dirk V. Espinoza
Brooklyn, NY

"Radio Activity" asks the same questions I ask myself everyday about radio. In New York, the major stations do play black artists, but the problem is, they only play the same ones. I am constantly searching the dial for something different. I would love to tune in and hear Lenny Kravitz, Maxwell, George Michael, *and* Rachelle Farrell. Need I say more?

C. Bristol
Brooklyn, NY

SCHOOL'S OUT

As a future educator and mother of a preschooler, I discovered after reading your article "Economics 101" [Get Up On It, by Eisa Nefertari, October] that I am terrified of the current state of education and its future. I am tired of forcing uppity, prejudiced environments on my three-year-old son, but I fear that if he doesn't attend school programs, his educational foundation will be limited (especially compared to the white students).

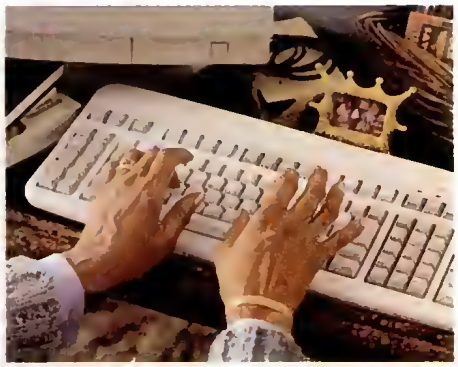
Staci Young
Staten Island, NY

Troy Jackson stays close to HOME, even when he's 100 miles away.



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Louise Wilson
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NOTHIN' ON TV
My friends and I recently had an intense discussion about this fall's television lineup, which lacks quality shows featuring people of color in leading roles. Danyel Smith's "Watching Channel Zero" [Start, October] effectively expresses our sentiments on the issue. What many fail to realize is that racial and ethnic prejudice rears its vile head in subtle ways, only to be detected by those who refuse to accept prejudice as a way of life.

Amin Killiebrew
Brooklyn, NY

Your article about blacks in or out of prime-time, nickel-and-dime-time television shows really disturbed me. You failed to ask the American who counts—the white sista or bro' from lower-income housing who watches both *Mad About You* and *Martin* for purely aesthetic reasons, or that yuppie black couple who watch the *Wayans Brothers* and *Frasier* for no other reason than these shows are great stress relievers. Give me a break with all this talk about blackness, *please*!!

Stella Shepard
Marysville, OH

I took offense at your attack on BET. Contrary to your claim, BET has repeatedly found the wherewithal to broadcast a number of African-American dramas after their early cancellations by the major networks (*Frank's Place*, *Roc*, *Generations*). BET would gladly produce new shows and broadcast more old ones if they could garner more financial support. Constructive criticism is one thing, but blindly and erroneously castigating our lone television venue is something we can't easily ignore.

Frank H. Staley
San Francisco, CA

CLUED IN
I give you props for your article on Stacy Dash [Look, by OJ Lima, October]. Ever since *Moving*, I've been completely taken by the sweetness of her face and mesmerized by those lovely eyes. She is a very talented actress and a very beautiful young woman.

Terrance M. Randolph
Laura, OH

ONE IN A MILLION?
I truly appreciated your Aaliyah review [Revolutions, by dream hampton, October]. There is no doubt that the girl is beautiful, with a heavenly voice. However, Ms. hampton slighted her when she compared her voice to Janet Jackson's "anemic falsetto." You might want to listen to *One in a Million* one more time, and then send Aaliyah an apology. Not to dis Janet, but on songs like "Heartbroken," "Giving You More," and "The One I Gave My Heart To," Aaliyah could be compared to a young Faith Evans. Let's not forget that Aaliyah is only 17 with plenty of time to grow vocally, unlike 30-year-old Janet, who has reached her peak. Aaliyah will undoubtedly become the next princess of pop.

Christopher A. Williams
Milwaukee, WI

I was terribly disappointed with the review of Aaliyah's album! Cutting up both Brandy and Monica in order to make to Aaliyah appear better was a complete turnoff. The writer states that Aaliyah's voice is stronger than Janet Jackson's, when in reality Aaliyah lacks the talent and charisma that Ms. Jackson possesses.

Joseph Starr
Waoato, WA

SHAOLIN'S FINEST
I have to give props to the RZA and the rest of the Wu-Tang Clan. ["The Next Chamber," by Chairman Mao, September]. In a world where everyone sounds the same, Wu-Tang come off with a totally different style that can't be touched. To me that's not just keepin' it real, that's keepin' it right.

James Powell
Willingboro, NJ

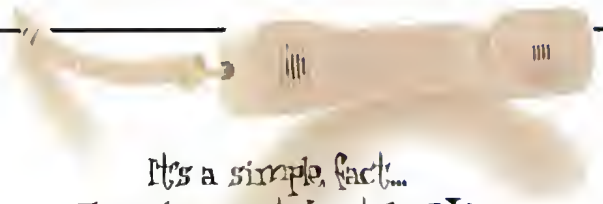
MARLEY MARL M.I.A.
The layout on the "Spin Doctors," photographed by Hassan Jarane [September], was phat, with only one major problem. Where was Marley Marl? You showed 16 DJs and a *major* player was missing. Not to include Marley was an insult—he's a man who helped pave the way for the rest.

Paul Gant
Hagerstown, MD

ROYAL FAMILY
Mr. Rivera wrote an outstanding article on the Latin Kings and Queens. ["Anatomy of a King," by Lucas Rivera, September]. For once, the media have gotten the whole story. As my brother King Blood said, "We are not a gang, will never be a gang, and never professed to be a gang." When Amerikkka sees brothers and sisters coming together for a cause, they are quick to label us as a gang or a hate group. In truth, we are here for our people, to uplift them in any way we can.

Rafael Diaz
Comstock, NY

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waiting for the end of the world

When I was six, I became aware of dates, and of ages, and I counted the years from my birth until the year 2000. I figured out how old I would be in the year 2000, and I never bothered with how old I'd be after that, because it didn't matter. It seemed such a long way away, it may as well have been the end of the world.

Now, almost 30 years later, we're pushing our faces against the cold glass of the future. And there's something final about the year 2000.

Two thousand is when we crash and burn. We know this in our souls and in our guts. If we were ever in any doubt at all, in four years' time there will be no doubt left: Aliens or no aliens, transporter beams or no, we will have escaped from the eternal present, and will, finally, be living in the future.

I just bought two newspapers. The "real" paper has an article claiming that old computers will stop working in the year 2000: Transported back in time by a programming glitch that causes them to inspect only the last two digits of a date, our laptops and desktops will imagine themselves to be in 1900. No planes will fly on January 1, 2000.

The "trailer-trash" tabloid states that before 2000 the government will tattoo us all with the Number of the Beast; that 44 percent of all Americans believe Armageddon is four years away; and tells us how to spot the coming apocalypse when the streets will run with blood and airborne AIDS will finish off the survivors.

I wrote a book, *Signal to Noise*, about the end of the last millennium, in the year 999, when people left their villages and gave away their possessions and waited for the world to end. But there was no huge apocalypse—just an endless procession of tiny apocalypses in a world that's always ending for somebody.

It's going to be the same this time around. We'll have a little chaos and party like it's, well, 1999, and then...life will go on as it always does. We'll muddle through somehow, and whatever happens, it's not the end of the world.

But then I wake in the night and remember: Back then, we lacked as a species the ability to make our prophecies of doom come true. *Neil Gaiman*

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JAYSON KEELING

The Venus II personal comfort system is some ol' next shit for those of us who are a) tired of tha bullshit females put us thru or b) can't get a female at all. My case is really neither, but VIBE asked me to test this joint out to see if it "pulls off" (ha-ha) what it claims.

Don't get me wrong, I don't "pump my fist" unless I'm at a hip hop show, but I'm into new experiences, naah mean? According to the promotion materials, this suitcase-sized thingamajig is supposed to function as an automated masturbation device, "providing between 20 and 350 strokes per minute, each stroke three to three and a half inches in length (approximately)." Yeah, whatever. If it can make me erupt like Mt. Vesuvius, it'll get props.

Well...it gets *nuff props*. But I wasn't about to develop a monogamous relationship with some shit that could be a car part. So with the help of my own flesh and blood Venus, I put these two "ladies" in head-to-head comp. Neither won, but each had its own unique advantages. (*Ed. Note: In the interest of fair play, we will review the Venus II's female counterpart, The Sybian, in an upcoming issue.*) *Kwest tha Madd Lad*

Venus I (female)

If you're lucky you can get over for a Mickey D's value meal, a coupla 40s and blunts, and havin' tight game to put up in tha ear piece.

Can't beat tha moanin', yellin', screamin', bitin', scratchin', droolin', etc.

Shorties can be edible.

Breasts soft and cushiony.

Doggie-style. (Nuff said!!)

Natural saliva is a special thing.

Machines can't scream ya name backward in foreign languages when you hit that spot.

If she's freaky, you might be treated to the ol' ménage à trois.

Can't Beat tha Real Thing!

Venus II (machine)

Costs $1,100 balls. But that's a small investment compared to Versace suits, Cristal, dinner at Tavern on the Green, hair and nails done, etc.

Don't have to put up with, "Not tonight, I've got a yeast infection."

The hands-free apparatus allows you to enjoy a sandwich while getting off.

Tube for your jimmy is cushiony-soft.

Ya won't get burned (unless you forget to use the free water-based personal lubricant).

Don't have to flip on tha machine for bitin' yo' shit.

You can call it tha next girl's name while taggin' it, and it won't get pissed.

No guilty feelin's when ya run up in the next piece.

You can be a two minute brotha....So what?

But don't take my word for it. Order a Venus II from the 3-S Corp. (800-300-3037) and see for yourself.



Head Case

Deion Sanders markets his wares

Football/baseball two-timer Deion Sanders, the undisputed king of self-promotion, is hyping himself once again with his own line of—you guessed it—bandannas. Called Head-Ware With an Attitude, the bandannas come in various textures and colors, including silk, denim, cotton, metallic, and glow-in-the-dark. You can even get one printed with his "Prime Time" logo. Since we know how complicated bandanna wearing can get, we tried one out, carefully following the step-by-step instructions that Deion was nice enough to include with each headrag. *Andréa M. Duncan*



STEP 1
Fold the bandanna into a triangle.



STEP 2
Grasp the two corners at the base of the triangle. Center the bandanna low on the forehead. The top of the triangle should fall over the back of the head.



JAYSON KEELING

STEP 3
Draw the two ends of the bandanna around the back of your head and tie the two corners where they meet at the middle. Tuck the corners and ends under the knot and...*voilà*.

bullets point-blank news



• MONUMENTAL BLUNDER
On September 12, a monument to commemorate the 200,000 black soldiers who served during the civil war was scheduled to be dedicated in Washington, D.C. The five-day ceremony had only one snag—the statue wasn't completed. The African-American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation, a non-profit organization overseeing the memorial's construction, fell $1 million short of the $2.6 million estimate. The group hopes to raise enough money to complete the statue by spring.



COURTESY

• TOMMY BOY SHOWDOWN
It was on when Naughty by Nature's Treach pulled Tommy Boy labelmate Posdnuos of De La Soul off the stage in front of a packed house at N.Y.C.'s Palladium on September 7. Treach, who was offended by the rhyme "So stick to your Naughty by Natures and your 'caine," from the intro on De La Soul's *Stakes Is High*, swung at Pos before being kicked out of the club. "This is a misunderstanding between family," says a Tommy Boy executive. "De La were metaphorically describing how some people act."


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Wild Wild West

New York rappers get back in the saddle


Sadat X

DANNY CLINCH

In the late '80s, vid-eos from the Juice Crew, EPMD, and, most memorably, Kool Moe Dee established an aesthetic link between New York's shoot-'em-up rhyme battles and gunslinger showdowns from the 19th century's "Wild, Wild West." Now, it's time to strap on your chaps again and saddle up, potna; hip hop's cowboys are riding back into town.

"We wanted to do something a little different," says Sadat X, whose crew posed in knee-length dusters and ten-gallon hats for the *Wild Cowboys* album cover. "Hip hop was getting stale." Sadat also guests on O.G.C.'s "Wild Cowboys in Bucktown," and his nasal twang is sampled amid Deadwood Dick references and pistol shots in Jeru the Damaja's "Black Cowboys."


Nas

MARC BAPTISTE

Earlier this year the Fugees' "Cowboys" found Wyclef yodeling like Roy Rogers while Pras boasted: "Fuck John Wayne, I shot the sheriff!" And Queensbridge desperado Nas compares New York's streets to the Wild West in his "Shootouts."

What's with all the cactus and tumbleweed? "Homage," says Sadat. "Black cowboys blazed trails in this country and never got the credit." *David Bry*

YO, YoYo

Advice from an intelligent black woman

I'm a 13-year-old black teenager going through puppy love. I have a boyfriend whom I love dearly and have been dating for three weeks. But his best friend keeps trying to get with me. He calls me 24-7 and says things like, "I'm taking you from your man 'cause you know I love ya." My boyfriend isn't worried about it, but it's starting to bother me.

P. C.
BURTON, MI

Dear P.C.,

I think you're a little young to be dating, but anyway…if you're old enough to date, then you're old enough to know what to do: Tell him to stop harassing you. And tell your boyfriend that if he can't stop his friend from coming on to you, then you'll find a man who can!

I made a real big mistake and cheated on my girlfriend. I didn't know how much she meant to me until it was too late. Now the woman I cheated with is pregnant, and my girlfriend has moved on. I love my girlfriend and desperately want to get her back. What should I do?

K. W.
NEW YORK, NY

Dear K.W.,

You got yourself into a real bad situation, and your penance was losing your girlfriend. If you really love her, leave her alone. You've made your bed, now lie in it.

I've been dating this guy for a year and two months, and during our relationship we've broken up at least five times. It's like this: After a month or two of no communication he comes back, and I open my door. I don't want to let him go, because deep in my heart I love him very much. But I also cry my eyes out wondering why he treats me this way.

T. K.
BROOKLYN, NY


CYNTHIA MORGAN

Dear T. K. (and all girls),

Pay attention: Any man who runs in and out of your life whenever he feels like it will *always* do it. You should be sitting home crying because you left *his* ass. When you love someone and that person is not good for you or his love doesn't equal yours, you will suffer. So recognize that he's bad for you and move on. If you're with him, you cry; if you're not, you cry—so bail.

I am a 16-year-old girl who is involved with a 24-year-old man. We have a relationship that has been sexual since December '95. My parents don't accept us together; but I care about this man a lot.

SNUGGIE
CALUMET CITY, IL

Dear Snuggie (a.k.a. Jailbait),

I have ill feelings about a 24-year-old man dating a 16-year-old girl. You need to date someone your own age—you're too young to know why you want to be with this man. But don't put all your faith in me; slow down and listen to your parents. They know a lot, whether you want to believe it or not.

Need some intelligent advice?
Write to: YO, YO YO, c/o VIBE, 205 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016
Please include return address and telephone number.

bullets point-blank news


RETNA/ARCHIVE PHOTOS

•CIAO EBONY BELLA!

A national crisis erupted in Italy this September when 18-year-old Dominican-born Denny Mendez was named Miss Italy. Mendez, a four-year naturalized Italian citizen, received more than 1 million phone-in votes from TV viewers. But when two contest judges who protested the award were suspended, a public debate over race and national identity was sparked. "I know I don't represent Italian beauty, but they elected me," Mendez said. "What am I supposed to do, refuse?"



•CAFFEINE DIVA

See you later, Mrs. Olson. America is now taking its morning cup of Folger's with Aretha Franklin. The Queen of Soul became the second celebrity to endorse the percolated java juice, following country superstar Randy Travis in "The Best Part of Waking Up..." TV-and-radio campaign. "We're thrilled Ms. Franklin is part of the project," says Proctor & Gamble (Folger's parent company) spokesperson Lisa Jester. "Her music adds a special excitement to the campaign."



Even without wheels, this seat will take a community further than any car could ever go.

It's a given. Most of us know that with education and hard work, you can do just about anything. But it takes a little more than just providing a classroom for our kids to do well. It takes nurturing and an understanding of how to succeed in our society. We believe that's why Historically Black Colleges and Universities graduate more black children into a productive work force than any other major university. HBCUs fill our communities with brilliant black professionals, graduating over 40% of the nation's black doctors and dentists, 50% of black lawyers, and 75% of black PhDs. That's why Nissan supports HBCUs by sponsoring the Nissan-HBCU Summer Institute to help enrich and develop HBCU faculty. With this support, black institutions have better aids and tools to empower and inspire our children for our community and our future. Nissan is dedicated to taking people places.

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THE REALITY FEMALE CONDOM

Imagine practicing safer sex that's sensitive, uninhibited and totally satisfying for both of you. Better yet, stop imagining and start experiencing the *"Reality"* female condom. You will discover that you can reduce the risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including AIDS, without reducing the intimacy or the ecstasy.

WHAT ARE THE STATISTICS?*

- 12 million new STD cases/year–86% occur in persons 15-29 yrs
- 1 in 3 college students has an STD
- women's risk to STDs-more than 2x's higher than men's
- more than half of the pregnoncies each year are unintended

*reference on request

WHAT MAKES IT DIFFERENT FROM OTHER METHODS?



"Reality" acts like a borrier. The woman inserts it ahead of time. It's made of clear, strong but soft plastic. *"Reality"* rarely rips or tears during use and lines the vagina allowing free movement for the penis.

"Reality" can be put in place long before intimacy. To insert *"Reality"* squeeze the inner ring and push into the vagina as far as possible. This ring helps to hold the female condom in place inside while the outer rim stays outside the body and helps to protect. When both partners are ready, the penis is simply guided into the female condom. Extra lubricant is added for extra pleasure and ease of movement.



DOES IT PROTECT?

Failure Rates, 1 Year	Typical Use [1]	Perfect Use [2]
Reality Female Condom	21%	**5%**
Male Latex Condom	12%	3%
Cervical Cap	18%	11%
Diaphragm	18%	6%
Spermicide	21%	6%
Unprotected	85%	

1. 'typical' use includes not using it at all or not using it correctly
2. 'perfect' use is when you use the method correctly every time you have sex

WHY IS IT EASY TO USE...AND KEEP USING?

Most women report that insertion is easy, especially after using *"Reality"* two or three times. Both men and women report that *"Reality"* **feels good.** There's no restricting the penis and the soft feel of the thin but strong plastic together with the lubricant is pleasurable. **Men like it! Women like it!** It's availoble at your pharmacy!

SHOULD YOU TRY REALITY?

Yes, if you:

- can't ar won't use male lotex condoms
- seek a new non-hormonal method af contraception and sexually transmitted disease preventian
- use the pill but wont an additianal method to reduce the risks of STDs
- are allergic to latex

▪ If used properly, male latex condoms are highly effective at preventing sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS (HIV infection). ▪ If you are not going to use a male latex condom, you can use *"Reality"* to help protect yourself and your partner. ▪ *"Reality"* only works when you use it. Use it every time you have sex. ▪ Before using *"Reality"*, read the directions and learn how to use it properly.

Call **1-800-274-6601** for: Free samples. Questions. Product Informatian.

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start

Soul to Soul

B-Legit and Daryl Hall put on a happy face



Following the example set by Reese's peanut-butter cups, hip hoppers and rockers continue their attempts at creating "two great tastes that taste great together." In the latest collaborative effort, rapper B-Legit–from the Vallejo, Calif. crew the Click–teams with famed blue-eyed soul man Daryl Hall for "Ghetto Smile," a reworked version of Hall & Oates's 1975 classic, "Sara Smile." According to Legit, getting Hall to croon along was easy. "When he heard the opening guitar lick of the track and how it was put together, he said he [knew] he wanted to do it," says Legit.

While the pairing may throw some for a loop, Legit sees it as perfectly natural. "Hall's a playa, baby. The girls love him. He sent me some tickets to his concert out in Reno, and if you woulda seen the response from that crowd, you'd be, like, 'Yo, this boy still got it.'" *Chairman Mao*

Cold Fusion

Other notable collaborations

Afrika Bambaataa and John Lydon, "World Destruction" (1984): *Headz weren't ready for the shit they got.*

Run-D.M.C. and Aerosmith, "Walk This Way" (1986): *The foundation.*

Fat Boys and Beach Boys, "Wipeout" (1987): *The Fat Beach Boys—a supergroup experiment gone disastrously awry.*

Sonic Youth and Chuck D, "Kool Thing" (1990): *Prophets of post-punk meet the Prophet of Rage and kick out the jams.*

Anthrax and Public Enemy, "Bring the Noise" (1991): *Fails to live up to the original.*

R.E.M. and KRS-One, "Radio Song" (1991): *Shiny, happy hip hop.*

Judgment Night soundtrack (1993): *A mixed bag of treats and trash.*

Jon Spencer Blues Explosion and Sunz of Man's Killah Priest, "Greyhound Part 2" (1995): *Potential theme song for Jesus of Navarone.*

Dog Eat Dog and the RZA, "Step Right In" (1996): *Possibly the darkest chamber yet.*

Lou Rawls and Biz Markie, "I've Got You Under My Skin" (1996): *Two legends cold chillin' wit' Cole Porter.* *CM*

Sound Check

Bobbito Garcia plays the tracks, Lee Quinones states the facts

From 1974 to 1979, graffiti pioneer Lee Quinones was the king of New York City's No. 5 subway line, which runs from the Bronx to Brooklyn. His whole-car pieces drew a lot more attention than tags and throw-ups, and influenced other writers to start covering bigger spaces. From 1977–78, Lee was the Metropolitan Transit Authority's No. 1 most wanted graffiti artist. He was also among the first graffiti artists to show in Europe (along with Fab Five Freddy) back in '79, and he played the lead in *Wild Style*, which to this day still stands as the best nondocumentary hip hop film ever made. Nowadays, Quinones



is a multimedia artist who art directs films, is active in N.Y.C.'s street-racing scene, and still shows his work in galleries.

• *Wild Style* soundtrack–"Rammellzee and Shock Dell at the Ampitheatre with Grandmaster D.S.T."

L: Yeah! That was pretty wild. I didn't realize it until recently but that movie is a cultural icon. So many heads tell me it changed their lives. [Director] Charlie Ahearn was a genius to grasp everything that was going on then. At first I didn't want to do it 'cause I was still bombing. The movie would be 411 on how I did my shit.

B: What do you think of this song?

L: The beat was totally Bronx.

B: You must of heard it a million times while filming it.

L: Yeah. I got burnt.

• Billy Joel–"Scenes From an Italian Restaurant"

L: Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Billy Joel and shit. That's "Italian..."–uhhh wait...

B: [*sings*] "Perhaps a bottle of rosé instead..."

L: There was a song of his that inspired one of my paintings back in 1982–"Angry Young Man." Didn't really get its props but it was about man's anger and anxieties and how he doesn't let it out growing up, then goes to the grave as an angry old man. Music has always inspired me. I used to go to the park jams back in '72, '73, in the true L.E.S. [Lower East Side], with bags of paints on my way to the train station. I'd think to myself, *While these people are partying, I'm going bombing*. I even used to break–we called it burning before it generally came to be called breaking.

• Tito Rodriguez–"*¡Hay Que Frio!*"

L: What's that, "The Gran Combo?"

B: [*singing again*] "*¡Hay que frio!...*"

L: Ha-ha-ha! I just recently got back into Latin music; for some reason I was never into it.

B: I can identify. My pops was a musician, so I grew up listening to him blasting this at ungodly hours. Now, I dig it.

L: My father could dance up a storm. Recently I saw a salsa/merengue jam session out in Coney Island. It was so beautiful seeing the love and the sexiness displayed in Latino dancing. So expressionistic. There is something that never dies in Latino culture. Without culture, you don't have existence.

• Tracy Chapman–"Fast Car"

L: Yeah, this is what's-his-face....

B: It's a woman.

L: Oh, yeah, right. Who is this?

B: Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car."

L: I discovered the whole street-racing scene with some of my paintings. It's so explosive but at the same time, anonymous. I was there as an angel, an onlooker. The cars are metaphors for what the people are all about. It's unheard energy in the night. I'm like a spirit that goes from time zone to time zone and just touches people. That's what being an artist is all about–being free in spirit, seeing people's lives, and painting it.

bullets point-blank news



PHOTO BY MERLY JOHNSON

• THE JEEPS, LEX COUPS RAG

If you're sweating the new Mercedes, but don't know much about cars, then check out *African Americans on Wheels*. The new quarterly for black car buyers is available in 27 newspapers or on the Internet at http//: www.automag.com. "*AAOW* appeals to the average consumer," says publisher Randi Payton. "But unlike other car magazines, we don't ignore the lifestyles of African-Americans." So if, like L.L, you're concerned with your jeep's backseat, you'd better read up.



COURTESY OF WARNER BROS.

• MICHAEL JORDAN CRIME SPREE!

Despite having their hearts broken by him in the 1991 NBA Finals, Los Angeles fans still love Michael Jordan. More than 200 promotional posters for his movie debut, *Space Jam*, have been stolen from local bus-stop shelters. The film, which opens November 15, features Jordan and Bugs Bunny battling an alien hoop team. A Warner Bros. spokesperson said surveillance cameras were installed, but the thefts continued. "I'll steal the posters from anywhere," said one Jordan fan. "I'll steal Michael himself if I get a chance."

All the Way Live

Seventies artists get down (once again) just for the funk of it

Kick-started by sample-happy rappers and old-school compilations, the funk has been creeping back toward the mainstream since the early '90s. This year marked the music's return in its purest form: live and direct. Lakeside, Con Funk Shun, Graham Central Station, Zapp, the Isley Brothers, War, and Brick all blew up venues across America. The incredible response has enabled many of these pioneers to loosen the choke hold of the R&B industry's overrated youth movement and return to the charts with their own funky material. It's about time. *Rickey Vincent*

George Clinton/ P-Funk All-Stars

Funk Legacy
Intergalactic tribal freaks Parliament-Funkadelic, Bootsy's Rubber Band, and extended family mobbed tha scana with slamming, ridiculous hits and atom-blasting shows.

Most Sampled Song (legally cleared)
"Atomic Dog," 58 times.


MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

Oldest Member
Dr. Funkenstein, 56.

Latest Release
G.C. gets all up in the groove with *T.A.P.O.A.F.O.M.* (550 Music/Sony).

New Stage Show
Fewer props, more gray beards. Crunchy, noisy band still turns it out, jamming for hours at a time.

The Gap Band

Funk Legacy
Oklahoma pop funk stylists Charles, Ronnie, and Robert Wilson rode the synth-bass, Charlie's scats, and cowboy hats to dafine early '80s funk.

Most Sampled Song (legally cleared)
"Outstanding," 35 times.

Oldest Member
Ronnie Wilson (won't giva age).

Latest Release
Live & Well (Intersound), recorded liva in February, features old-school favorites "Party Train" and "You Dropped a Bomb on Me." Reached No. 65 on the R&B charts.


MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

New Stage Show
Loose, kicking sound delivers tha hits; thrivas on Charlia's vocals.

Cameo


PYRAMID ENTERTAINMENT GROUP

Funk Legacy
Larry Blackmon's scorching hit machine used a dozen players in lata '70s, then "downsized" into '80s new-wave phase and came of aga with "Word Up" in 1986.

Most Sampled Song (legally cleared)
"She's Stranga," eight times.

Oldest Member
Larry Blackmon, fortysomething.

Latest Release
Recorded live last year, *Nasty* (Intersound) mixes classic cuts with two new studio tracks. *Best of Cameo Volume 2* (Mercury/Chronicles) brings back the burning eight-minuta instrumantal "It's Serious."

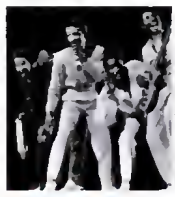
New Stage Show
Polished, throbbing workouts are as hot as avar.

Kool & the Gang

Funk Legacy
Pioneering early-'70s jazz funk band went from blazars, shades, and tha essence of *cool* to polyester and sequins, selling out to disco in 1978.

Most Sampled Song (legally cleared)
"Jungle Boogia," 35 times.

Oldest Member
Charles (Claydes) Smith, 48.


MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

Latest Release
PolyGram has rereleased tha essential *Live at tha Sex Machine* and six other vintaga albums. There's also the all-naw CD *State of Affairs* (Curb/Atlantic), a lackluster attempt to be contamporary.

New Stage Show
Cute, lots of fun, bring the kids. Don't expect the Funk Bomb.

Ohio Players

Funk Legacy
Leroy "Sugarfoot" Bonner's lopsided afro, double guitar, and bluasy vocals fit the band's stylish outfits and wild album covers, making for a dafining '70s experiance.

Most Sampled Song (legally cleared)
"Funky Worm," 20 times.

Oldest Member
Sugarfoot, 53.

Latest Release
Awesome new live session *Ol' School* (Intersound) features legendary jams "Skin Tight," "Fire," and "Sweet Sticky Thing." Also put out the sloppy, never-before-released '78 live recording *Jam* (PolyGram).

New Stage Show
Ferocious, soulful jam session destroys any doubts about Sugar's genius. Easily as strong as the old days.


MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

Rickey Vincent is the author of Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of the One *(St. Martin's Press)*

Ten Years Later

MIKE TYSON



November 22, 1986. The place: the Las Vegas Hilton. WBC heavyweight champion Trevor Berbick stands in one corner of the boxing ring; Mike Tyson, undefeated in 27 professional fights, stares him down from the other. With 25 seconds remaining in the second round, Tyson doesn't just knock Berbick out, he knocks him out of the ring, making Iron Mike, at 20 years and five months, the youngest heavyweight champ ever. The following year Tyson stops James "Bonecrusher" Smith to win the WBA title and IBF champ Tony Tucker, thus becoming the first heavyweight to hold all three crowns. We all know what happens next. Since being released from prison, the new Tyson—disciplined, Muslim—is on a mission to reclaim his belts. A decade after he was first crowned, Tyson's realness still makes him one of hip hop's top icons. *The Blackspot*

Say What!?

"I cut that 400-pound Afro off....And as soon as I cut it off, Snoop Dogg put it on."

—Lionel Richie on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*

Etc....Etc....Etc.....


PHOTOFEST

Traci Bingham

Baywatch, tha TV drama famous for its informativa baach-safety tips, added soma color to its staff this saason with fly girl Traci Bingham, the show's first black female regular....Still in TV-land, ABC has put Spike Lee on the payroll. He's developing a show tentativaly titlad *L.I.E.* Tha kinks are still baing worked out, but it's vagualy described as a sitcom about two man, ona black, tha othar white, who drive the Long Island Expressway together. Sounds like he's still got some work to do....'Tis the season to buy jazz, so don't miss Dexter Gordon's six-CD set, *The Complete Blue Note Sixties Sessions*, scheduled for a November 12 release....Also due that day is L.L. Cool J's greatast hits record, *All World*, on Daf Jam....TLC and Faith Evans claaned up at this year's *Soul Train* Lady of Soul Awards, but it was the dashing Vanessa Williams who took home tha Lena Horne Award for career achiavamant....Not as fortunate as Vanassa is Parspective Racords. The sevan-year-old label run by Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis went out of business on September 30....Last but not least, the hip staff at Good Morning America, especially weatherman Spencer Christian, get a pound for recently playing and skanking to Bounty Killer's "Change Like the Weather" on national talevision.

Bullets by Ericka Blount, Omoronke Idowu, OJ Lima, Minyah Oh, and Joseph V. Tirella

In the MIX

Keep on Keepin'...

1. At the H.O.R.D.E. Festival on New York City's Randall's Island, Me'Shell Ndegé-Ocello delivered the kind of funky soul that only she can. (2.) Lenny Kravitz also rocked the H.O.R.D.E. house. 3. Props to Keith Sweat (shown in front of his new Atlanta nightclub, Industry), who has joined the esteemed list of artists turned entrepreneurs. 4. DJ Premier (left) and Jeru celebrate the release of Jeru's sophomore album, *Wrath of the Math*, at Arca in Manhattan. Jeru obviously couldn't be happier. 5. Look closely, that's Rick James the day he was released from Folsom prison—brown bag full of belongings and everything. Hopefully this time he'll stick to making hot music and keep his extracurricular activities to a minimum. 6. Jada Pinkett must really love her friends Tisha Campbell and Duane Martin because in spite of the injured foot she incurred while walking her dog, she served as a bridesmaid at their wedding. Here, she attempts to get her groove on during the reception. 7. A broken foot could never stop Bobby Brown from doing his own warped version of the cabbage patch as his woman (lookin' more like his mama) looks on as if to say, "That's *my* baby out there actin' a fool!" Whitney and Bobby were in Atlanta for singer Pebbles's 32nd birthday party. 8. Snoop Doggy Dogg, shown at the after-party for the MTV Video Music Awards, could probably use the entire bottle of Moët after a boring show like that. 9. At 92.3 the Beat's Summer Jam in Los Angeles, the station's DJ Theo chills with Faith Evans. We really just wanted everyone to see the former Mrs. Smalls with black tresses. What do ya think? 10. At her triple-platinum party held at Manhattan's Copacabana, Mary J. Blige handed the mike over to her beautiful and proud mother, who tried not to embarrass the singer too much. (11.) Little Kim performed in honor of Ms. Blige. Yeah, sure, Kim, we *all* believe Chanel made that classy bodysuit. 12. Foxy Brown recently had a birthday party at Manhattan's Club Mirage. She and her mother celebrated the special day that happened an undisclosed number of years ago.

Shani Saxon


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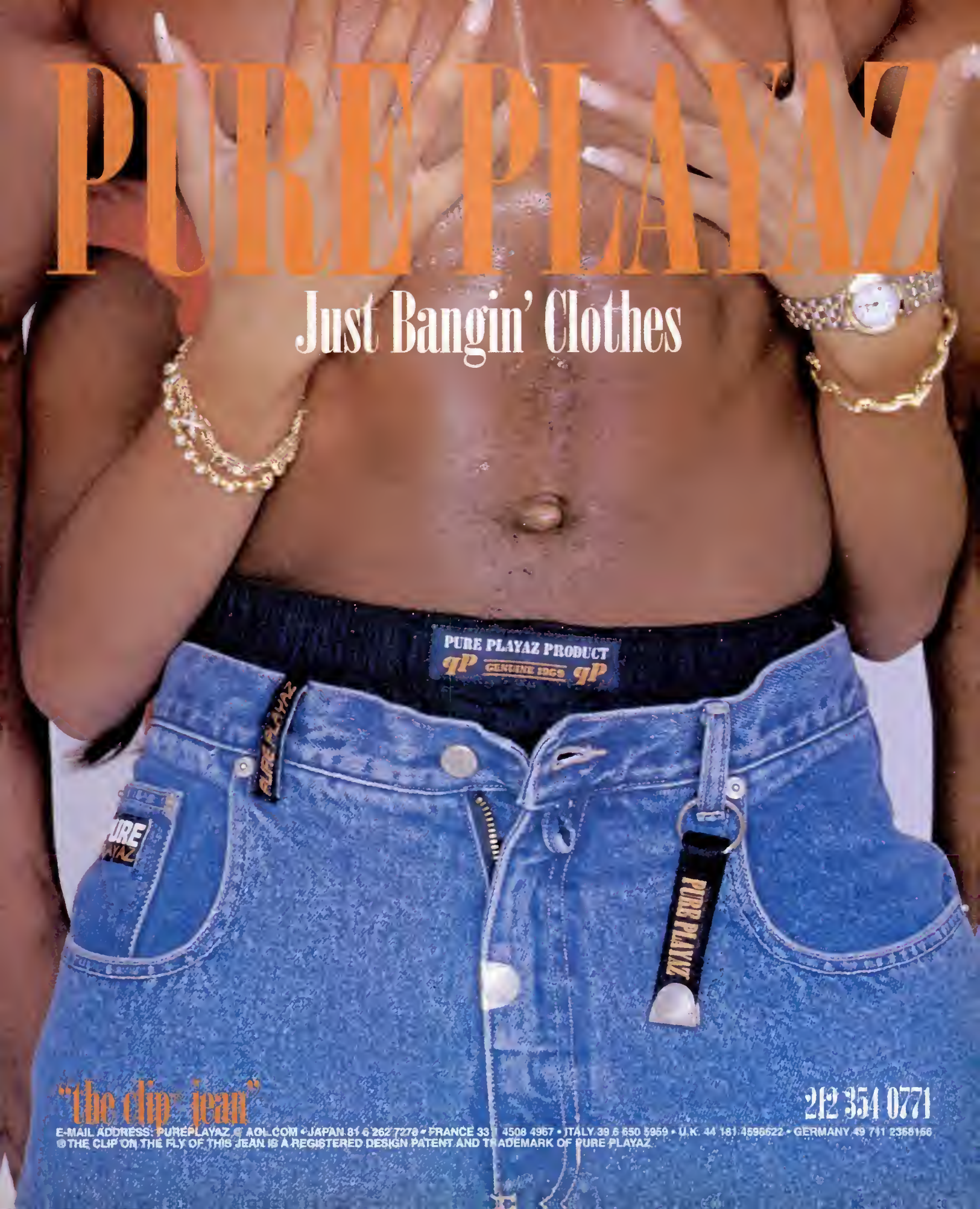


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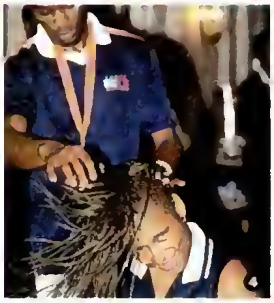

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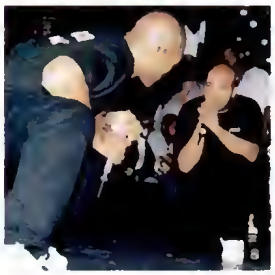
This year's VIBE Music Seminar, held at Manhattan's Waldorf=Astoria hotel, was a phenomenal success. Our condolences to those who missed out. The fashion show was a major highlight: 1. Basketball queen Lisa Leslie brought the crowd to their feet when she—altitude, attitude, and all—displayed the gold medal she and her teammates won at Atlanta's summer games. (2.) Boss man Quincy Jones is still amazed at how much fun it is to be the Man. (3.) Tommy Hilfiger, the show's featured designer, was escorted out by Spinderella (left) and Aaliyah. (It's the shades that make them all think they look *so* cool.) (4.) The show couldn't start for Yo Yo until her makeup was perfect and the braids were tight. (5.) Don't you just hate it when you button up your jacket up wrong? Actor Mekhi Phifer knows the feeling a little too well. 6. In conjunction with VMS, Motown sponsored a white-linen affair that was heavenly. Actress Nia Long (left) and singer Tamia want to know which of them has the whitest teeth. 7. Congratulations to Pri the Honey Dark of Queens, N.Y.C. (right)—the gifted winner of our Sprite MC battle, held at Harlem's Apollo Theatre—and the runner-up, Carnage. 8. During the Def Jam showcase at the Roseland Ballroom, Run-D.M.C. moved the crowd like no one else at the entire seminar. They're the only group that could ask a New York crowd to wiggle their fingers as quickly as possible, and everyone does it, no questions asked. 9. VIBE's third-anniversary party served as the elegant grand finale. Total took to the stage and enthusiastically performed all their jams. (10.) With help from Redman, a very dapper Keith Murray also gave a high-energy performance. (11.) The most stylish brother in the house, crooner Maxwell, got a lot of attention from the ladies. (12.) That's right, girl! Monifah shows the crowd exactly who's the queen of the stage. (13.) Rapper Mic Geronimo also came out to support our efforts. Respect to everyone else who did the same. *S.S.*












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Job Korps: Between the Pay-Sheets

The following story is true. The facts are based on actual events that happen during the course of the daily grind. No names have been changed to protect anyone!

In the Justice League's never-ending quest to enlighten our readers, we've diligently unearthed all sorts of bones buried in the world of business. This month's investigation reports painful details about a type of corporate incentive that is administered exclusively off the books. Let's get straight to the point. The topic we'll be discussing today is sex (and sexism) in the office. For the most part, men get the big raises and women get bent over a hard desk.

For example: Anita Mill has the perfect life. She's a would-be executive who works for a law firm, owns a brownstone, plays racquetball on weeknights, and feeds a dog. She's great! To make things even more interesting, she's expecting a baby! Now, Anita's been on her dream job for more than a year, so she doesn't have to worry about making a living, right? Wrong! Anita may be an excellent worker with a bad sense of timing, or maybe she's a little naive to her boss's true *projection plan*. They never even told her she was fired. Her boss waited until she went on maternity leave to give her job away.

Here was a gorgeous woman of substance, a true diamond. Career-minded and intelligent, she was *still* conveniently downsized. Within two months, she slapped her firm with a sexual discrimination suit that eventually put her back in the revolving door. Justice came sweet for Anita, in what is sure to be one of the best upsets in that company's history.

Put yourself in her place. You've successfully held your job for more than the usual probationary period. You've always completed tasks efficiently, you were cordial to all who called, and you put in overtime almost all the time. To your knowledge, you've done everything right. But even when you're the best, you always gotta ask yourself, "If I were my boss, would I hire myself?" or, "Is someone waiting to steal my job?" And the big one: "Would I go down to be down?" Well, why should you?

Sometimes, the supervisor brings in a body that needs taking care of. You don't trust her, yet in some ways you also wish you had her power of manipulation. She's overfriendly, likes to give hugs to the male staff. She has her own agenda and a list of rules that wears no panties.

You trained her well—too well. Now she's having lunch with your boss. She's



gotten more responsibility and visibility in the office. The higher-ups love her mainly because she's cheaper than you are, plus she has a price. You thought you had job and financial security, but what you got is No. 23 on the unemployment line!

So wha' happen, cap'n? Was it your attitude? Did you get caught talking on company time once too often? God knows you got a big mouth. Or did you take too many days off? No, your biggest mistake was underestimating the ambition of the competition! With all your charisma and the important allies, weapons, and soldiers you've accumulated, you let the new jill corrupt your base of operations.

One day, while putting in hours at the Justice League World Office located at the corner of 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue, I was approached by Anita Mill. She made me promise to cover this issue with the utmost seriousness. After feeling the wrath of Anita's math, I assured her I'd put the right team on the assignment. I split them into two groups: The Rightguards and the Lifeguards. Rightguards were all male members of the federation, while the Lifeguards, of course, were strickly females. They hit the streets, asking the public two simple questions: Should office relationships be permitted? What are the limits and/or pitfalls?

We won't announce the verdict yet, mainly 'cause I want y'all to be in on the riots when it all goes down. But I will say this, there are a lot more people who would bend over for their boss than you may think!

I witnessed a demonstration not long ago when a young woman named Rosalie Osias spoke out on how to benefit from bedroom interviews. The top brass at WOR radio canceled her talk show after reviewing the notes for her segment on "How to Seduce Your Boss." She was advocating all sorts of novel tactics for corporate advancement, like sleeping with your supervisor and taping the whole thing for future reference.

"The charge of sexual harassment in the workplace has become a dulled weapon that has been overused by far too many women who can't figure out another way to advance their careers," said the Long Island attorney turned radio personality, who describes herself as Bella Abzug's worst nightmare.

"If you want the same things that men have, then you've got to play the same game," she declared. "Women can be sexy, brainy, and powerful, all at the same time. There's an additional weapon that women have, which is sexuality and sex. If you are going to use sexuality as a weapon, use it to get maximum return."

Maximum return—she sounded like my kind of broad. I had a few choice queries for her, like, How do you cope with double standards in the workplace?

"You learn early on, if you're smart, that shrewd, aggressive behavior is what it takes to make it in this business. Recognize who has the power and the authority and attack in a subtle way. You need someone in power to put their arm around you. I don't walk around sayin' Go sleep with the boss. But there are some women that do, and all I'm sayin' is, if you're gonna do it—make sure that that person is in a position to advance your career."

What is it you're really after, Rosalie? If it's not more take-home pay, or a good screw, then what's the purpose?

"I plan to own the whole company! The feminist revolution has collapsed and burned in America's workplace, and there is an entire generation of women who don't know it. I want to create an open, honest dialogue—a woman talking to women about how to use sex to break through the corporate glass ceiling. I want to be the one to hand out the checks at the end of the day!"

In other words, don't *fall* in love—stand in it!

Tuph Street

By Bönz Malone

ILLUSTRATION BY DONTAY TCS



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Ho Box Office

Once upon a time in the Boogie Down Bronx, Brent Owens, '70s college student and weekend gypsy cabdriver, stumbled upon a hooker-fest known as Hunts Point. Two decades later, Brent Owens, filmmaker, got HBO to bankroll a documentary about the lives of several women who ply the world's oldest profession around that way—hence the succinct title *Hookers at the Point*—which first aired on the network's *America Undercover* series in late September.

Hunts Point is a postindustrial wasteland that would be a no-man's land if so many men didn't roll up in that piece on the regular looking for the love money can buy. Shot over a five-year period, the film portrays in detail the lives of three prostitutes, Lisa, Angel, and Cindy. This astounding piece of reportage manages the rare feat of both humanizing and drawing sympathy to prostitutes and the dangers they face while questioning their culpability. Whatever opinion of prostitutes *Point* leaves you with, there's no denying Owens props for gaining his subjects' trust. They eventually wear radio microphones on the job—providing interior sound for scenes shot from outside as blow jobs are administered.

"I wanted to put the viewers in their shoes so they'd feel the same thing the women feel when they're out there," says Owens. "Because it's dangerous out there, man. I've heard stories of guys running razor blades on women's backs soon as they're in the car—sick shit. For the most part, we were very lucky in not running up on some of the real crazies out there."

If all this seems borderline porno, rest assured that voyeurism is not the order of the day. In mademoiselles Angel, Lisa, and Cindy, Owens has found three live-wire conversationalists whose sound bites break your heart, pluck your nerves, and, occasionally, even tickle your funny bone. You can't help feeling for them in a bluesy, laughing-to-keep-from-bawling kind of way.

Some of the women's dialogue actually does sound like an outtake from a Dolemite movie or a bad skit off a West Coast rap album. "Everybody was meant to do something," says Lisa at one point. "I believe I was meant to be a ho." The level of absurdity dips further when Angel and Sinbad, her husband of eight years, explain the rationale behind Sinbad's writing down the license of every car she enters: "If they ever kill me, he can go to the police with the license plate of my killer."

Lisa's pimp, Cat, describes the difference between the "gentlemen pimps" of years ago and the "wannabe schoolboy pimps" of today, who haven't "put in the proper time learning the game."



Business as usual at the Hunts Point meet market.

When he reminisces about the "raw-dog pimping" that used to go on at Hunts Point, you'd think Iceberg Slim was off-camera feeding the bro' his lines. When someone asks if his full-length mink coat is fake fur, he retorts: "A real pimp don't wear nothing fake." Talking about the life he wants for his and Lisa's son, Cat declares: "We want him to have everything a pimp and ho's kid's supposed to have. I hope he grows up to be president or something."

Owens, a Bronx native who grew up in the Fort Apache area, has worked in feature filmmaking as a location/unit production manager for Spike Lee, Ernest Dickerson, Mario Van Peebles, and Sidney Poitier. His own directoral debut, *The Bronx: A Cry for Help*, was a by-any-means-necessary project that took him 12 years (1974–1986) to complete. He partly credits Poitier for encouraging him to make *Point* after he worked with the screen legend on the set of *Hanky Panky* in 1981.

"One day Sidney and I got to talking about the wild things that happen on the streets of New York," Owens recalls. "He didn't believe me when I told him there was this area of the city where women walked around with nothing on. One day we wrapped early, and he said 'Take me up to this area you been telling me about.' Well, Sidney's eyes opened so wide when he saw these women walking around butt-naked. His West Indian accent even came back when he said, 'Look at de child, de child is urinating in the street.' At that point there was a 400-pound pimp who had 35 girls. He'd make every one of them take off an article of clothing for every 15 minutes they were out there and didn't make any money. It could be raining or sleeting, he didn't give a damn."

Owens has a feature-length version of the project in the works that will be titled *Ho's Up, Pimps Down*. Whereas that film will cover prostitution throughout New York City, *Point* focuses on the failed attempts of its protagonists to get out of the life, which is easier said than done—especially for those on drugs. As Cindy says: "Crack is the best pimp there ever was."

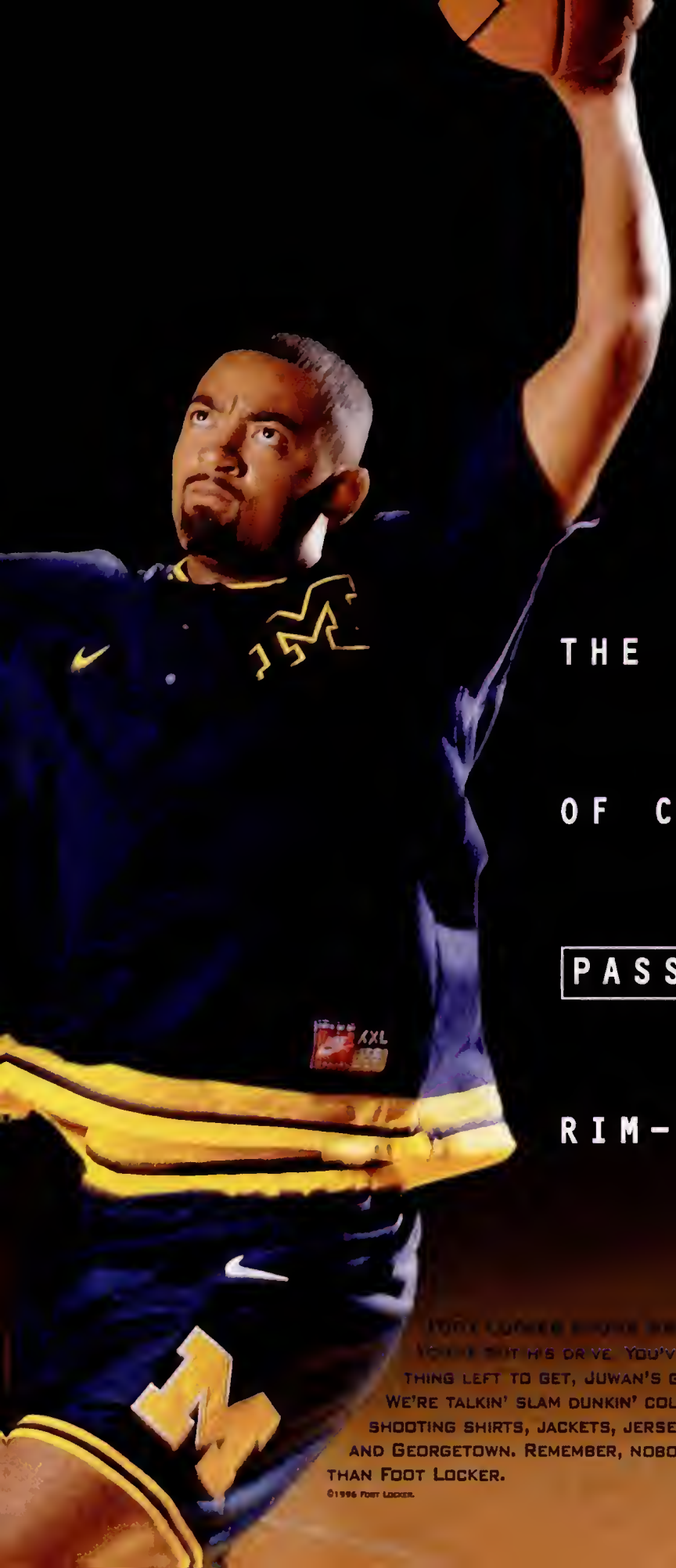
Noticeably absent from the film is any depiction of a law enforcement presence at Hunts Point, which Owens says was to protect those among the film's subjects who still work the area. He says many of the cops there see some of the women professionally. When HBO began airing promos for the premiere in September, some hoes were harassed by officers demanding their autographs. "The way the police act up there is like an army of occupation," says Owens. "They control stuff up there, but then when they're off duty, they're dating the same girls. We need to look at prostitution for what it is. These women are providing a service, and it should be legalized.

"Some of the women we interviewed have over a hundred arrests. But it's like a cat-and-mouse game: The cops arrest them, and two days later they're out. You won't find information on prostitute murders in the media, and the police will tell you there's only been a few murders in the past few years, but there's been a lot more than that. A lot of girls have disappeared, and there are serial killers still walking the street."

Owens hopes his film will give a group of clearly intelligent women a chance to find the help they need to change their lives. "Cindy is an educated woman," he says. "Before she got into drugs and prostitution, she was a hospital clerical worker. Angel's biggest dream is to become a veterinarian's assistant. Once you talk with these women, you find that they're normal people who have the same aspirations as everyone else. One of the reasons these women agreed to do this film is because deep down inside, they want to get out of the life, and they're waiting for that miracle to come. They realize this life and the drugs aren't going to lead them nowhere but an early grave."

Black-Owned

By Greg Tate



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NEXT

PEOPLE ON THE VERGE

ERIC BENÉT

Truth be told

"WHAT I'M HEARING ON THE RADIO LACKS ANY KIND OF ORIGINALITY and creativity," says Eric Benét, spooning the last piece of melon from his fruit bowl into his (usually) soft-spoken mouth. The singer's understandably got a slight attitude. "They call what me, D'Angelo, and Maxwell do alternative R&B, but this is what soul music is *supposed* to be any goddamn way. I'm just as freaky as the next guy, but how many times can one say 'Lick me?' "

On his first solo joint, *True to Myself*, the 26-year-old innovator is attempting to reclaim rhythm and blues from horny soul stylists. Using his satin voice and lush arrangements, Benét creates honest material, like the thought-provoking "Chains" and the swooning "While You Were Here," that captures both the butta and the brutal in his life.

Growing up in the "ultraconservative and segregated" Milwaukee that *Laverne & Shirley* made famous, Benét joined a Top 40 cover band called Gerard, which traveled throughout the Midwest playing songs like MC Hammer's "U Can't Touch This" to drunk rednecks. "We played one bar in Minneapolis called the Iron Horse," he remembers. "The customers screamed 'Free Bird' and sprayed beer on us."

In 1992 Eric, his older sister Lisa and cuz George Nash Jr. (who did most of the production on *True to Myself*, along with Demonté Posey and Zapp's Roger Troutman) formed a group called Benét, which released an unheralded album on EMI. Adding teardrops to the fire, Eric's girlfriend, with whom he shared a daughter, India, died shortly afterwards in a car accident.

It was a few years later in a local Milwaukee studio called the Mix that Benét recorded his own personal theme, "True to Myself," his blue funk dissolving in the heat of his own creativity. He recalls, smiling, "I wanted to write a song that could be both an anthem and advice to my daughter, because looking at her I knew I could only be depressed for so long. That was a song that came straight from my soul. Something that people could feel." And he doesn't even say "Lick me." Not once. *Michael A. Gonzales*

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARLENA BIELINSKA

Copyright Material

NEXT

MISSY

Make the music with your mouth, Miz

"IF OTHER PEOPLE ARE TALKIN' ABOUT CRICKETS," Missy Elliott says with a friendly southern drawl, "then I'm talkin' 'bout butterflies. I wanna have *my own* style." Relaxing in a Midtown Manhattan hotel room, the songwriter/MC wears a baseball jersey, sweat pants, and pounds of jewelry. "I don't even listen to the radio," she continues. "I don't wanna get caught up in what's going on."

That's tricky, though. Because nowadays Missy *is* what's going on. Since producer Puffy Combs recruited her to rap over the remix of Gina Thompson's "The Things That You Do," urban airwaves have been brimming with Missy's trademark *"Yee-yee-yee-yee-Yow!"* Her onomatopoetic stutter (imagine Da Brat with Tourette's playing See 'n Say) also graces the remix of Aaliyah's throbbing "If Your Girl Only Knew" and 702's "Steelo"— both of which Missy wrote.

"I get my style from cartoons on TV," she says, checking her constantly bleeping pager. "Like, if I'm watchin' *The Flintstones*, I listen to how they stop the car with their feet. And I'll make the same noise. Cars, animals, chicken [heads]—*bawk-bawk-bawk-bawk!* Other groups sample sounds. I do it with my mouth."

Growing up in Portsmouth, Va., Missy, 24, wasn't always such an original. In seventh grade, she won a string of talent shows performing Salt-N-Pepa routines. Missy's first loss brought her home in tears. "Salt-N-Pepa!" she cries, mocking hysterics. "They failed me!"

During high school, Missy wrote her own songs and formed a vocal quartet called Sista. In 1992, when Jodeci descended on Virginia for a concert, the girls went back to the R&B gods' infamous hotel to sing for them. The result? A deal with DeVante Swing's production company and "M. Elliott" writing credits on two platinum-selling Jodeci records.

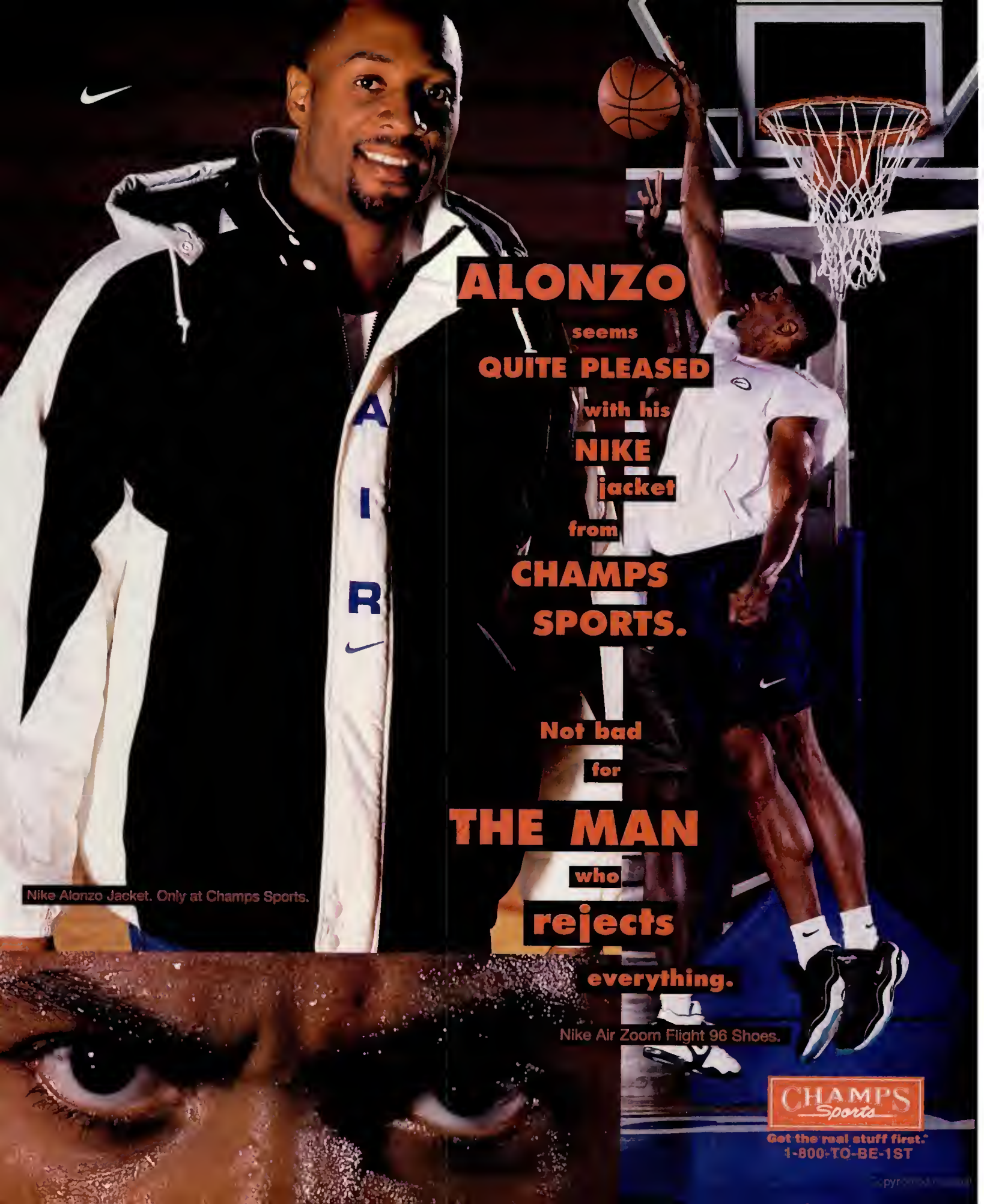
She's out on her own now, but the tag "hired gun" still suits Missy just fine. She's currently cashing royalty checks from New Edition's "You Don't Have to Worry" remix, and everyone from En Vogue to Mariah Carey wants to record her songs. "The money's on this side," Missy says, shrugging off the idea of her own album (though major labels are calling). "And I'm havin' too much fun doing it this way." *David Bry*



MAKEUP BY BRIEN KELLER

PHOTOGRAPH BY HARRIET LEIBOWITZ

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NEXT

DO OR DIE
Pimpin' Ain't Easy



From left: N.A.R.D., Belo Zero, AK

"MAN, I KNEW IT WAS THEM ALL ALONG." Do Or Die's Belo Zero is speaking about a recent investigative report by the San José *Mercury News* claiming that the CIA introduced huge amounts of cheap cocaine into South Central Los Angeles in the 1980s to help fund a covert operation in Nicaragua. Kinda throws a new light on the assertion that gangster rap is to blame for black pathology. "People are quick to point the finger," Zero says. "They just don't like it when you point the finger at them. That's why rap is the enemy. People don't like what we say, but I'm going to keep telling it."

In this case, it isn't what Zero's Chicago crew are telling so much as *how* they're telling it. Do Or Die's debut album, *Picture This* (Rap-A-Lot/Noo Trybe), features the Legendary Traxster's varnished G-Funk–influenced tracks, from the ominous leer of "6 Million" to the gangsta-leaning smash single, "Po Pimp." Mostly, the crew—Zero, AK, and N.A.R.D. (Niggas Ain't Ready to Die)—cover familiar life-of-a-player lyric territory. But their high-speed, snare-drum delivery ("pimp-lyrical tactics," they call it), as pioneered by local hero Tung Twista, adds a new slant. Just like fellow Chi-Towners Crucial Conflict did with their "rodeo style."

D.O.D. have been around awhile—13 years, actually. Brothers AK (Dennis Round) and N.A.R.D. (Anthony Round) began as a duo, eventually picking up Zero (Darnell Smith). After long dues-paying stints (and near tragedies: AK got shot in '89; Zero in '91; N.A.R.D. did a few months on a weapons charge in late '93), they decided to go at the rap game full bore. They released an underground single, "No Love," in 1994, followed up two years later with "Po Pimp." That single went on to sell 60,000 copies, a figure that caught the eye of Rap-A-Lot Records CEO James "Lil' J" Smith.

"We never *had* that door open," N.A.R.D. says, "but now, with Crucial, Common, Twista, we have an opportunity to bring some recognition to Chicago. We have that hunger."

Tony Green

PHOTOGRAPH BY DENISE MILFORD


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Ron Westray, Wycliffe Gordon

NEXT

WYCLIFFE GORDON AND RON WESTRAY

Trombones 'n' Harmony

IN A CLOSED SECTION OF HOULIHAN'S restaurant in N.Y.C., Ron Westray leans over a steaming plate of shellfish linguini and a nice Beaujolais. He wants his intentions to be known. "The mastery of jazz involves the mastery of improvisation," Westray says, "which is the ability to create spontaneously, based on a proposed form." His partner, Wycliffe Gordon, nods in complete agreement over his Caesar salad.

Who would know this better than two southern-born and church-raised trombonists from the Wynton Marsalis School of Thought? Both Gordon, 29, and Westray, 26, were discovered by the trumpeter during their days in the music-rich, black collegiate South (Gordon at Florida A&M University; Westray at South Carolina State). This connection led to tours of duty with Marsalis; ivory prodigy Marcus Roberts; the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra; and, now, the release of their formidable debut LP, *Bone Structure*.

A trombonist summit in the tradition of J.J. Johnson and Kai Winding's classic mid-'50s recordings, *Bone* is deeply rooted in the gumbo of blues and southern gospel known as the New Orleans sound. Accompanied by Roberts, Herlin Riley (drums), and Reginald Veal (bass) on compositions like "Coming Is Going..." and "New Beginnings (Groove Cone)," the duo highlight the complexity of their instrument's provocative, sometimes gritty, sometimes fluid, sometimes some-shit-you've-never-heard-before sound.

One tune, "Esoteric Advent (Turkish Coffee)," is a call-and-response conversation about Westray's real-life Maxwell House Moment. "I was in Istanbul last summer having a cup of coffee," he explains, "and upon leaving I was surrounded by the five bartenders and the owner. They wanted me to pay the equivalent of about $250 or *try* to kick my ass."

Unscathed, Westray and Gordon have recently collaborated on the Marsalis-composed score to John Singleton's upcoming film, *Rosewood*. Plans are also in the works for *Bone Structure* to become a series. "We're out here to define the natural, profound sound for the instrument—to play the trombone like the trombone can be played." Westray says this seriously. Their intentions are clear. *Terrence A. Jones*

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID KATZENSTEIN

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When my son was brought into this world, and I realized me and his mama made him, that was beautiful. I was, like, Damn! Bringing life in is beautiful. Now how about saving some lives instead a taking lives? People say, "Snoop Dogg is a bad influence." "Snoop Dogg takes lives." Lemme turn that shit around. Now I'm fittin 'a save some lives. Now, what y'all gonna say?

LAST MAN STANDING

After Dr. Dre's departure and Tupac's murder, the Death Row empire is in need of rebuilding. It's time for tha Doggfather to step up. ***By Ronin Ro. Photographs by Philippe McClelland***

There's a siege mentality inside Can-Am Studios, the Tarzana, Calif. soundlab once frequented by the Death Row family—'Pac, Dre, Snoop, and the rest of the gang. Now, Dr. Dre is busy setting up his own label, and Tupac Shakur is fighting for his life at the University of Las Vegas Medical Center. He and Death Row CEO Suge Knight were caught in a drive-by shooting five days earlier which has left the label's artists, employees, and bodyguards introspective and edgy.

Nate Dogg, however, is trying to finish his contribution to the forthcoming album *A Death Row Christmas*. The potbellied vocalist wears a short-sleeve black dress shirt, beige pants, and a gold chain. His cousin Butch, a gospel singer, is in the recording booth fumbling with Nate's poignant lyric: "Blessed are those who receive / All of their Xmas

dreams / I can't complain / And I'm hoping that's the way it remains."

George Pryce, Death Row's dapper, bald, fiftysomething publicist, pulls out a long, thin Benson & Hedges Deluxe Ultra Light. He lights it, and bobs his head. A 30-year publicity veteran, he's been working overtime since the Vegas ambush, taking instructions directly from Knight, managing the crisis day by day. He's supposed to hook up an in-depth interview with the label's last remaining star, Snoop Doggy Dogg, but under the circumstances, that's looking less and less likely.

The studio television catches Pryce's eye, and he leaps to his feet. "There's Suge! They're running an update on 'Pac. I gotta go see what's going on." Minutes later, he returns, visibly depressed. "Seems Old Boy is getting worse."

"Nothing cool about that," Nate grimly replies. Putting his song aside for the moment, he agrees to discuss the Crip-infested county he and Snoop came up in and still big up on their albums. "Long Beach is fast," Nate says. "Every day you hear something bad, something going wrong. I seen a lot of people kill each other when they damn well could've been friends."

"[Gangs] are real close in Long Beach," he goes on. "Everybody's family, but it comes to a point when somebody gets hurt. It's like, 'Man, it ain't like I just wanna go *get you*, but you killed my homie.' What am I supposed to do?! There are certain rules: If you know somebody did something, you don't just say, 'Ay, *po*-leece, I know who did it!' It's more like, 'Okay, I'll take care of it.' "

"A LOT OF PEOPLE AFRAID TO SAY, 'HEY, I WANNA LIVE, AND I WANNA KEEP Y'ALL ALIVE.' IT'S COOL TO BE ABOUT PEACE. WHAT'S WRONG WITH LIVING AND SEEING TOMORROW?"

Nate says he could sing before he could talk, and music—together with his mother's strong guidance—was his only refuge from running the streets. After he left the church choir, Nate's singing led him to Snoop and DJ Warren G, who formed the group 213 in 1991. After Dre enlisted Snoop's chilling vocals on the bicoastal classic "Deep Cover," Nate had a foot in the door at the label Dre had just founded with Knight. "Death Row wasn't nothing but a dream," Nate says, "but I was a Dr. Dre fan. I was a believer. I believed all in that dream."

He hopes that his upcoming album, *G-Funk Classics Vol. I*, will move an audience that's become desensitized to random killing. "These days you never know what's gonna happen. Perfect example—not to bring this, but, uh... Tupac just got shot. It had to be, what, five, 10 guards around him? I been with these same guards before, and I had my little gun and I'm, like, I'm taking it with me. They like, 'Naw, don't take it, we got you.' Makes me wonder: Did Tupac say that that night?

"We're fucked up," he continues, his voice rising. "We need help bad. We run around killing motherfuckers, shooting all them people that's our same color. I think everybody just lost hope. Just, 'Fuck it. No matter what, we end up dead or in jail so I'ma just act the fucking fool.' Only comment at this time I can say about anything is, Pray for Tupac. That's about it. The rest of it don't seem to make no sense right now."

We were all brothers, and for him to be gone like that... it hurts me a lot. It took a whole lot out of my heart when he left me. 'Cause he's my hero. People don't know how deep, loving, and caring 'Pac was. He was more than a rapper or an actor, he was a real friend.

On Friday the 13th around 4 p.m., L.A.'s Channel 7 reports that Tupac Shakur has been pronounced dead. George Pryce answers his phone on the first ring. "It's true," he says. "He's gone. I'm trying to talk to Suge, to prepare a statement. I spoke with Snoopy—he's back from Vegas. I told him we'd come by the studio, but I don't think we'll do it tonight. I'm very busy now, okay?"

A call to Dr. Dre's new label, Aftermath Entertainment, yields nothing. "You know Dre ain't trying to get wrapped up in all this," says a spokesperson. "Nothing personal, but he doesn't want anyone from Aftermath saying anything about it."

RBX, however, who left Death Row three years ago and recently signed with Dre, is anxious to discuss the situation. "Suge's style was suave," says RBX, who's known Knight since they both played football for UNLV. "Fat-ass motherfucker, but he could move." When his cousin Snoop first began working with Dre, RBX used to drive the teenage rapper to the producer's home. Dre heard RBX freestyling one day, and said, 'You should rhyme too.' Within a year, he'd appeared on Dre's triple-platinum landmark, *The Chronic*. But he and Suge were already bickering over contractual issues.

RBX remembers that he, Snoop, and Tha Dogg Pound had just finished a performance at the New Regal Theater in Chicago when he decided enough was enough: "It was over some bullshit. There were eight people performing that night. We came into the dressing room after the show and saw eight things of chicken," he shrugs. "I just went and grabbed some chicken, and everybody else followed me and started eating too. Turns out that Suge invited some of his homeboys up there—he ordered the chicken for them. He came up there: 'Who ea'in'—Aw, you mawfuckers eatin' my chicken?!' I didn't wanna be fucked with 'cause I just ate. I'm, like, Man, why you beefin' over some fuckin' *chicken*! That's what it was. Motherfuckers took that shit and blew it up. That was just one of the straws."

Another was the label's decision to fill Snoop's mini-movie, *Murder Was the Case*, with images of "the devil going in Snoop, possessing him, being his king." Death Rowers wanted RBX to portray the devil. "I was, like, No. Y'all are entering some shit, you don't even know what you're getting into. I want no part of this. And don't be trying to take my voice and do some shit with it on them computers to put me on there. 'Cause if you do, I'm coming at you. Straight-up."

RBX was long gone by the time Tupac signed with Death Row. Still, he knew his friend Dre was having problems with 'Pac, who'd begun spreading rumors Dre was gay (see "Toss It Up" on Shakur's posthumous Makaveli release). RBX was preparing an answer before he learned Shakur had been shot. "I felt it was gonna happen," he reveals sadly. "Rappers can't keep talking trash. You ain't really out there gangbanging, so why you gonna promote that shit? You got to grow up. If you're 30, still talking like you 16, you might be retarded. You might need to get your shit checked."

RBX says he thought the shooting would, at worst, force 'Pac to retire. "Then I heard: TUPAC SHAKUR DEAD and was, like, Aw, no. That's crazy. The little beef I had with him? I squashed it. 'Cause I ain't with this shit. When he passed, he stepped over. He's with the Father, he's on my team now. I'll give him a 'Rest in Peace' and go about my business."

I wanna live now, and I wanna see y'all live. That's what it's about. A lot of people afraid to say, 'Hey, I wanna live, and I wanna keep y'all alive.' You don't have to be afraid to be about peace, to not wanna get on and squab, not wanna kill. It's cool to be 'peace.' What's wrong with living and seeing tomorrow?

Dressed entirely in black, George Pryce rises from his seat at Death Row's Beverly Hills offices. Rows of framed portraits by Pryce's computer say a lot about his role at the label: Suge's son, the spitting image of his dad, holds a cell phone to his ear. Snoop's wife sits in profile with their smiling son on her lap. Before the recent drama, Death Row was in the process of expanding, signing MC Hammer, releasing a greatest hits album, opening an East Coast office run by old-school beatmaster Eric B. But now this....

I can tell Pryce is under stress. Snoop is high in the studio and isn't returning calls. Phones are ringing. Receptionists say over and over, "We'll be issuing a statement." Everyone wants to know when Tupac's memorial will be held, and where. Pryce is having trouble finding a venue. One place would have been perfect but some numbskull blurted out that he was from Death Row. Pryce sighs and lights a stogie. "I'm trying to book the memorial at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium," he says. "The police station is right across the way. They have this parking lot where people can mingle—for anyone who's upset about not getting in. I'm also trying to do it in the morning so we won't attract people who like to ride," says Pryce, hoping for a violence-free affair. Then he adds, only half jokingly: "But Suge loves that shit." After a couple of days, the memorial gets indefinitely postponed.

That night a Compton-area Crip with music industry ties speaks of the fighting that's broken out since Tupac was shot in the company of Knight, whose preference for red clothing is well known. "War is an understatement," he says calmly. "Six [Crips] from over here died, and five [Bloods] over there died. They got my boy the other day, coming out his house in the morning. One day the nigga was here, the next he's not, all because of that Tupac thing."

Captain Steven Roller of the Compton PD denies that Tupac's death has touched off a gang war. "Our intelligence sources haven't given us any indication that these killings are connected to the murder of Tupac Shakur in Nevada. I'm sorry to say it, but gang members *do* get killed." Days later, 23 gang members are arrested in connection with Tupac's shooting.

Right now, with the loss of my big brother 'Pac, it's real difficult. That's a hard pill to swallow. But I can't let him down by not doing what I'm s'posed to do—keeping Death Row on top. I know that it'll make him upset to know my album's slowed down by me sobbing or crying. The show gotta go on.

Six days after Tupac's passing, George Pryce—chain smoking and frazzled—finally gets Snoop to commit to uttering a few words on tape. Death Row's last super-



DAMN, I SEE DEMONS
"Who wants to be living that life where we gotta be looking over our shoulders?"

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star is under the gun. On top of everything else, the label is pressuring him to finish *Tha Doggfather*, his follow-up to the 4.8 million-selling *Doggystyle* album, and he isn't happy about it.

Snoop's holed up in Digital Shack, a small, unassuming studio, where he's working with DJ Pooh. Every wall is adorned with gold or platinum RIAA platters, mostly for Pooh's collaborations with Ice Cube. Dressed entirely in blue, Snoop sits on a couch engrossed in a Sony PlayStation football game. Tha Dogg Pound's Kurupt, session pianist Priest "Soopafly" Brooks, and towering bodyguards surround him.

In Studio A, Snoop sits with his back to us and bobs his head. "Snoop Bounce," Pooh's reworking of an overused Zapp breakbeat, starts to play. The new song has scratches on it, quotes from early EPMD, and a voice wailing *Death Roooow*. Snoop listens intently, head bowed. "Snoop Upside Ya Head," like so many Death Row releases, exploits an old song's nostalgia value. Snoop seems unsure how to deal with unenthusiastic journalists. On "Up Jump tha Boogie," he chants an old Sugarhill Gang lyric. The engineer stops the song; the sample is crooked—the kind of mistake that happens when you rush. "Ay, lemme hear 'Doggfather,' " Snoop drawls, then leaves the room. More glossy radio pap: a generic Jodeci chant, quotes from Run-D.M.C. "Yo, I ain't trying to floss," Snoop raps, "but (Murder, Murder, Murder) was the case that they lost."

The first thing Snoop explains is that *Tha Doggfather* was created to "please people." Like Hammer (who in May 1994 said, "Me and Snoop are one and the same"), Snoop wants to become a pop music superstar. For him, being in control is important. He's proud that he was able to have input on production, mix ideas, and mastering levels. Asked if it is different from *Doggystyle*, he nods and replies, "I ain't got no Dre producing. Dre didn't do one beat. It's my flavor." The mention of Snoop's former labelmate inspires lengthy monologues. On hearing that he's expressed sadness about ending their partnership, Snoop shakes his head.

"I can't say I miss him, but I can say I appreciate him for leaving," he says in measured tones. "If he wouldn't have left, I would've been some cutthroat trying to be up under his wing and follow in his direction. Now I have to take the lead and try to be better than him. I ain't got no beef with Dre or nothing negative to say about him. It's just all about moving on, being a *man*, and making music.

"And I'm glad Suge was man enough to just let Dre go," Snoop adds, "without no big ol' *fight* or *fuss*. That's the way we came into it, and that's the way we should leave." Snoop's suddenly pensive, like he's thinking about his own situation, about what would happen if *he* ever decided to bounce. "If a nigga got differences," he continues, "a nigga got differences. Let him go his way."

"I'm not mad that Dre's gone. I'm *happy*. Because I'm able to do the type of shit I always wanted to do. I wanna be artist and executioner. That's why the music is more... it's so *happy*. It's not 'Fuck everybody, I'm mad, I'm ready to do something.' It's some happy, cool shit that a smiling motherfucker can play for his kids."

Four years ago, Snoop was nobody, I remind him. Might he be suffering from post-Dre syndrome? Snoop sucks his teeth at the suggestion. "You can believe the hype and say Snoop ain't gonna be shit without Dre," he replies cooly, "or you can say Dre ain't gonna be shit without Snoop. It's all on you." Now that he's collaborating with DJ Pooh, Snoop leaps into revisionist history: To him, Pooh and Dr. Dre were the West Coast's two production pioneers. "Dre was getting all the props but Pooh's work is just as good—if not better."

"I plan on giving them a complete album," he says, pulling out all the stops. "Meaning a complete stage show live—*and* pay-per-view—and doing a minimovie with a soundtrack. Sooner or later, movies and cartoons for the kids, like *Romper Room*, *Doggyland*. I really wanna have a cartoon like *Fat Albert* where I can narrate." He sips from a can of Sprite and turns the tables on me: "Now lemme ask you something," he says. "Whatchu feel about the songs you heard. I'm falling off? I'm falling off?"

Though he was cleared of murder charges last year, Snoop's public image didn't go unscathed. "It fucked me up," he admits, " 'cause a lot of people were scared to meet me and do things with me. I think that's prob'ly why I never been in the movies. I think a lot of movie people were scared of the reputation, like, 'We want Snoop in the movie, but fuck that! We don't wanna deal with him or his people.' "



ENTER THE CENTER
"Whenever Death Row artists come out, everybody else gotta bow down."

Since Death Row paid his legal fees, Snoop has to be a cheerleader for the label. He's aware of Death Row's image as strong-arm thugs. But he wants people to know he's not like that. "Since I was blessed with the opportunity to beat my case, I just thought of doing the right things and surrounding myself with the right people. So my rhymes start becoming more positive, not to always focus on the bad times but hoping that it can get better—but in a cool way. It's not soft. It's still *G* about it, but I got game now, I got education, I wanna live now. I got a little son, and I wanna see him grow up, and I gives a fuck what anybody say."

But sometimes Snoop gets caught in the contradictions. He'll cover Slick Rick's "La-Di-Da-Di" and, on *Tha Doggfather*, Biz Markie's "The Vapors." But then he'll appear on Tha Dogg Pound's "New York, New York"—and stomp through Manhattan in the video like some gangsta Godzilla. "That record didn't dis no individuals, boroughs, peoples, or labels," he's quick to say. He just wanted to pay tribute to Flash's original. He credits the song to Kurupt, who wrote a rhyme inspired by "battling 300 MCs outside of a Manhattan nightclub."

"If we was dissin', we woulda said 'Fuck New York, fuck your neighborhood, fuck you.' " But beef was brewing just the same. When Snoop and Tha Dogg Pound arrived in New York to film a video for the song, shots were fired at their trailer. "If I was gonna disrespect," Snoop rushes to add, "I wouldn't've even came to New York and *risked my life*."

Snoop admits that when he first came to the label, he was "hardheaded" and arrogant. "We were the newest label on the block, and I felt my job on this team was to be the initiator. Kind of like how Tupac was for us before he passed away. That's how I was—you couldn't say nothing bad about Death Row around me."

"Now, I'm still Death Rowed-out, but I'm more into business things," he says. Still, there's a certain attitude shared by all the Death Row family: "Whenever Death Row artists come out, everybody else gotta bow down. That's the standard we set, and it's up to you to uphold it."

Despite all the brave talk, Snoop is clearly devastated. Tupac's death has shaken him to the core. "We were like brothers," he says. "We lived in the same house and abided by the same rules." Literally—Knight had them both installed in condominiums in L.A.'s posh Westwood neighborhood, right across the street from one of his own cribs. "Me and 'Pac had the same values. But he went about his this way, and I went about mine that way. But we were all for the same goal, and that's the betterment of Death Row Records, of us as individuals, and as black leaders of the day."

"I ask myself all the time," Snoop says, "I'm like, Damn, why did he have to go? or, why couldn't he have just got shot and lived through it? But you can't question God. I mean, I'm hurting so bad and every time I'm confronted with that, it make me wanna cry." With Tupac dead and Dr. Dre departed, Snoop admits that he's under pressure. "They took one good soldier from us, and he'll never be replaced. No matter how many good people we got on Death Row, ain't nobody gonna ever be able to outdo 'Pac. One of my homeboys got took off the earth. Now it's up to me to continue the legacy he put forward."

That will be easier said than done. Snoop's now the front man for an organization that's under fire from the press, the feds (who are reportedly investigating Suge's gang ties), and the streets. Still, he's confident enough to try something truly radical—the rapper who once said he'd "never hesitate to put a nigga on his back" is trying to come off positive, hoping to be around long after his opponents and imitators sputter out.

"I talked to Suge," says Snoop. "Let's clean up this bad image. Let's make it easy on ourselves. Let's do the right thing. 'Cause we all righteous brothers." He sighs heavily. "We all wanna do the right thing. We don't like being put in that situation where we have to overreact."

Chin in chest, Snoop looks trapped; he speaks slowly, voice tinged with regret and self-pity. "Everybody knows a nigga could get crazy and do what he gotta do. But who wants to be living that life where we gotta be looking over our shoulders? We makin' money. We's'posed to be up here enjoying the shit and giving back to the community, going places and not worrying about shit. That's what I'm trying to put back in the game."



What we look for in a tree
is what we look for in a man...
fresh, tall and lights up when
we walk into the room.

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REASON
50


LEVI'S
HEM WITH THEIR EYES
01
No 366

Ooh, La, La



STYLING BY EMIL WILBEKIN. ASSISTANCE BY DEREK KHAN. MAKEUP BY ROXANNA FLOYD FOR ZOU ILLUSIONS. HAIR BY JULIE TAYLOR. THIS PAGE & NEXT: PLUM VELVET BUSTIER BY VIVIENNE WESTWOOD MEN COLLECTION. BOA BY NORMA KAMALI. GLOVES BY LA CIRASIA. JEWELRY BY ROBERT LEE MORRIS. HOSE BY WOLFORD. SHOES BY STEPHANE KÉLIAN

Heads ain't ready for Queen Latifah's next move.

By Danyel Smith. Photographs by Jon Ragel

Cutlery is clanging. Waiters with European accents are chatting quietly over garlicky pizza. Panevino, the restaurant in the lobby of Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall, is closed; the day's show over. It's a cool July afternoon dotted with thunderstorms, and New Yorkers are sucking their teeth at dismal November-like skies.

Queen Latifah's face, though, is luminous. Even under the slight shade of a blue baseball cap, her butterscotch skin radiates. She leans back in a chair, massively self-possessed, hair in a ponytail, body in nylon sweats. Latifah has an enviable, athletic comfort with her physique. She is good-looking and tall; an ample tomboy of a woman. "I wish I didn't have these little love handles on the side, but I'm not ready to chop 'em off, either," she says. "I'm not going to get liposuction or some shit. I love myself just the way I am."

The eatspot is vacant, but the waiters and buspeople amble through one by one, checking La out, saying nothing. She is an MC, a television star, and, now, with the provocative and tragic *Set It Off*, a film actor on the verge of greatness. In the movie she plays Cleo, a bank robber/gay →



girl/friend. Queen Latifah ("latifah" means fine and delicate in Arabic), also known as Dana Owens or as *Living Single*'s Khadijah James, checks her alpha-numeric pager and glances about for a clock. She won't be late for her Hoop Heads league basketball game.

"I don't consider myself more special than anyone else," Latifah says, outlining her lips with a reddish pencil. "I'm blessed, in some ways more than others. But nothing," she reminds, "is without a price."

"Queen Latifah" became the image, the icon. I sacrificed anonymity for her. It's not always about how I feel. Right now, I'd love to be doing something else, but we're sitting here on a rainy day, doing an interview—I gotta do what I gotta do.

People are insensitive sometimes. They think that's the price you pay for being a star. I don't think I should have to pay anything. I give you a show you enjoy; I give you records you like to listen to. That's my gift, and you support it. So we've done something for each other. But you expect more from me than I from you. If I was a star-type person—into being a star, always wanted to be a star—I'd probably flow much better within that. But I'm just, you know...

Queen Latifah, age 26, drives her 1965 black Mustang convertible so comfortably, it's like she's old enough to have been operating the car when it was new. *Oh*, she's chill. Rolling down West Broadway, top down, in late-afternoon traffic a day before our Lincoln Center meeting, everyone knows her. *Yo, Latifah! Hey, Queen!* At intersections they hold up napkins, take-out menus, disposable cameras, chewed-up ball-points. They want her name on paper, her photo, proof they were in the same space as Lady La.

By the time we get seated in Odeon, a cute Tribeca bistro, I've asked Latifah about her mom (love of La's life), her high school years (was a B student; went to the state basketball championships), the scar on her forehead (tripped over phone cord when she was eight), but not whether or not she's gay, which is what some people say about her, about MC Lyte, about so many tough girl MCs that you get caught between being pissed off at the stereotype (like you can't be a take-next-to-no-bullshit kind of girl and be straight?) and hoping it's true (because, why not?, and how dope would *that* be?).

It's a question Latifah "shrugged off" in *Essence* three years ago, and I want to know the answer for all the wrong—arrogant in my straightness, carefree in my obscurity—reasons. The fact that Latifah's sexuality is not the rest of the world's business does enter my mind, even though it's still reeling from the sight of Latifah-as-Cleo kissing a woman's tan, fishnetted thigh in *Set It Off*. I just ask her what's next.

"I'm not going to be a rapper forever," says the girl who's been on the mike for more than seven years, had a gold album with 1993's *Black Reign*, and twice been nominated for a Grammy, winning in 1994 for "U.N.I.T.Y." (and is back in the studio these days, working on her fourth album, set for release at the end of the year). "I'm always going to write rhymes," she says. "But that doesn't mean I'm going to always be able to compete in this business. I'm looking for challenges."

And thank God for that, I think, because that Queen persona was never poppin' the most. "Tough, but kind," wrote the *New York Times* in 1994, "she defies the stereotypes that have been attached to hip hop from both inside and outside the music." *Upscale*: "A regal rapstress." *Spice*: "Truly a universal role model that the black community consistently points to with pride." *The Boston Phoenix*: "Hip hop's busiest and most widely recognized matriarch." I just wasn't ever having it.

It was the lofty Afrocentric turbans, the way she was photographed with her shoulders back, all authoritative, that made me flip the page, the channel, whatever her image gleamed from. Yo Yo was way more *regular*, and her music induced far more joy. Same for MC Lyte—she was, even as she proclaimed her need for one, a ruffneck. By 1993, even Latifah was tired of the grand garb. "I had to break people out of expecting me to wear crowns all the time," she said then. "Like, I couldn't be Queen Latifah without them."

From 1989's "Ladies First" through "U.N.I.T.Y." (whose tinny "Who you callin' a bitch?" hook made me pump down the volume), Latifah, a former Catholic schoolkid, was one of the "queens" Arrested Development's Speech concurrently idolized and patronized. She was the type male MCs always said they *weren't* speaking of when they rapped about bitches from the projects. An African-American "matriarch" that mainstream white, as well as middle-class black America was immediately comfortable with, Queen Latifah, even at her fiercest, seemed too old-fashioned for hip hop. Her rep ruled her more than she ruled it. "Queen Latifah started out small," says Dana Owens, still a little amazed, "but she grew."

> "I'm not a dyke," says Latifah. "That's what Cleo is—men's drawers, the whole nine. Not me. I did my *job*. And I fear not. I fear not."

It was when she grew into the comedic actress she became on Fox's *Living Single* (starting in 1993) that I began to feel her power. Latifah isn't all queenly on the show, and moves through it like the Road Runner: fast, funny, and always with the last word. Her acting skills get sharper every season, and her singularity is based on *her*—not on what she was draped in. "*Living Single*'s fun," she says. "It's a good paycheck, and it's stable. I like my job." Still, she says she wants to do everything. "I don't wanna give up TV for movies, give up movies for this, give up records for...*uh-uh*. I want to do it all. And one day have some babies, a bunch of them. *Living Single* is not going to be on forever."

She's realistic about life in general because she's experienced some of the worst the real world has to offer. Latifah is still, and may always be, coming to terms with the death of her brother, Lancelot Hasaan "Winki" Owens. He died in a motorcycle accident on April 26, 1992, at age 23. They shared an enthusiasm for cycles, and the bike he died on was a gift from her.

Three years later, her BMW got jacked in Harlem. She was in it at the time, and a friend of hers, Sean Moon, was shot in the back. With no ambulance in sight, Latifah flagged down a passing car and got his bleeding body to the hospital. (He's fully recovered now.) "I wasn't scared," she says. "I did take [the thief] seriously, though. Once he saw the light in my face he knew I was Queen Latifah. He was stupid. It wasn't necessary to shoot someone who had no gun and who's walking away from you." The shooter is currently serving time in New York state prison.

She makes no apology, especially in light of the carjacking, for her own recent arrest on weapons-possession charges, though she offers a small one for the marijuana she also had on her. "I don't smoke weed anymore," she says, laughing. "It's not worth me getting in trouble and embarrassing my family."

What's not in trouble is Flavor Unit Management, which Latifah runs with old friend Sha-Kim Compere. Still regulating Naughty by Nature after all these years, the company's roster now includes Monica, SWV, and Groove Theory. Latifah's label, Flavor Unit Records, recently got out of its deal with Epic Records and moved to Elektra Entertainment. But she still wants more, better—to be the best at whatever's next. It's how her mother raised her. And it's why, after small roles in 1991's *Jungle Fever*, 1992's *House Party 2* and *Juice*, and 1993's *My Life*, she got an acting coach.

"I'm capable of being an excellent actor," she says matter-of-factly. "It's not going to be easy, and that's going to be the joy of accomplishing it—busting my ass to do something difficult and, hopefully, having it pay off." She says this is the first goal she's had in a long time. "Music, television...kind of became easy to me. And after my brother passed away, I really didn't care anyway. Flavor Unit was growing, but I personally didn't have a goal." Until *Set It Off* came along. "That," she says, "was what I'd been waiting for."

Set It Off, directed by F. Gary Gray (the 26-year-old auteur behind 1995's *Friday*), is the story of four women—Queen Latifah, Jada Pinkett, Vivica Fox, and neophyte Kimberly Elise. Through a series of melodramatic but believable events, they decide to hold up a bank so they can get the money they think will change their lives. The girls are the center of the action, and the boys—Dr. Dre as a gunrunner, Blair Underwood as Pinkett's love interest—must sit quietly and watch the fiery drama unfold on television, hoping that the women make it home safely.

"This is *Thelma and Louise Part II: Waiting to Exhale*," says Jada Pinkett, from her New York City hotel room. "*Set It Off* is going to stir up controversy—you're either gonna like it or hate it. *Nutty Professor*, *Independence Day*..." she says, alluding to her and costar Fox's more mainstream summer blockbusters. "Obviously people will like *that* stuff. You know what that is. Four sisters robbing a bank—you *don't* know what that is."

Gray says he was thinking of one of his favorite films, 1990's *La Femme Nikita*, while working on *Set It Off*. "You're talking to the guy who directed the video for 'Natural Born Killaz' for Dr. Dre and Ice Cube," Gray says, via his car phone from the streets of L.A. "Remember Cube's 'True to the Game' video? We kidnapped a guy and threw him in a trunk for dating a white girl. I've never been afraid to visually express things that aren't commercial. Look at the risk of putting African-Ameri-

can women in roles that white men would normally take. There is *nothing* to reference this film with. This is the most money—$10 million—New Line has ever spent on a film of this kind—I hate to call it urban, or black, or whatever, but that's what I mean."

The movie glows with nuanced performances from all four women, but Pinkett and Latifah rock the hardest. Pinkett's relationship with Keith, Underwood's understated portrayal of a Harvard-educated banker, rings with a newness you can't quite put your finger on until Pinkett explains. "His character opens my character's world a bit wider," she says. "But I couldn't really *go* there with him, and I didn't. It's rare," she says, "that you see a woman on film of any color who is in love but not out of control."

The Indianapolis-born Vivica Fox, who recently finished filming the romantic comedy *Booty Call* with Jamie Foxx and Tommy Davidson, plays the driven ex-bank teller Frankie in *Set It Off*. Fox is an eight-year veteran who has appeared on *Out All Night* and the *Young and the Restless*. She also played Will Smith's girlfriend in *Independence Day*. Gary Gray came on the set of that movie, during the filming of her big tunnel explosion scene, to ask Fox to read for *Set It Off*. Excited at the possibility of some "real meaty" roles for all four of the main characters in the film, Fox was even more into the idea of taking part in some action. "The guns were *fun*," she says with a chuckle. "We didn't want to look like *Charlie's Angels*, either, so we went to the range and got good. Gary was not going to allow us to be wack."

Nope, not regarding the handling of guns, or the handling of what some feel is an even more explosive subject. Queen Latifah describes Cleo, her character, as a "straight-up dyke." "A lesbian woman in film," Gray muses. "I thought it was realistic, and something we shouldn't hide from. Al Pacino's played gay roles, Sharon Stone kisses women—and they're on the covers of *Movieline* and *Newsweek*. But if black people do it, we've degraded ourselves, hurt the race. People can't seem to accept the fact that these people are *entertainers*. Latifah is different from Cleo; Cleo is different from Khadijah; Khadijah is different from Dana. White stars don't get persecuted for it. Why should we?"

Latifah knows there are people who question her own sexuality. And she's unshaken in her commitment to the role of Cleo. "I'm an



BLACK REIGN
"Queen Latifah started out small," says Dana Owens, still slightly amazed, "but she grew."

actor," she says. "That means I've got to play that role and convince you I'm that person. I've done that in this movie. The gay issue was not without stress. But I don't think anyone can stress me as much as I stressed over it myself."

People seem more obsessed than ever with trying to figure out who has a same-sex lover. Folks make a parlor game of trying to find homoerotic subtexts in the heterocentric *Living Single*, just as many viewers of *Friends* (the white *Living Single*) did this past season. The producers of *Friends* finally spoke out—not to reaffirm the heterosexuality of Matthew Perry—but to clarify the sexuality of his *character*, Chandler.

In *Set It Off*, Latifah's character is clearly tongue-kissing and loving her girl (the first print I saw, they were getting *down*; in the second print, one of the two keenly directed, sensual scenes had been fairly clipped back). The other characters in the film, with the exception of the slimy janitorial bossman (who gets his comeuppance), treat Cleo's sexuality with barely the shrug one might feel for a peanut-butter-and-collard-green sandwich—different, yeah. But, different strokes. Though Cleo's girl, Ursula, is strangely silent, their relationship—sexual, playful, and resonant with everyday emotion—is the most sophisticated treatment of a lesbian relationship in this era of African-American film.

Latifah is effusive, if not relaxed, when speaking on the often controversial subject. "It's normal to me and my family," she says of homosexuality. "Everybody wants to act like they don't know anybody gay, but they do. First, they've got somebody in their family, probably, so don't even trip like it don't exist. Second, this is Cleo's character. She is straight-up gay. I knew what was in that script before I took the job. That's why it was even more of a challenge to me. It was a brave move."









Clockwise from top left: Erika Alexander, Latifah, Kim Fields Freeman, and Kim Coles cracking up on *Living Single*. *Set It Off*: Pinkett, Elise, Latifah, and Fox celebrating their take; Latifah as Cleo, exhaling. Latifah rockin' the crown in *House Party 2*.

Cleo is not some boilerplate bulldagger. She is a full-blown human with issues that have roots in the black part, the poor part, the woman part, and the provincial part of who Cleo is. Latifah knows, though, that people are going to question her own sexuality even more than they already do—not just because she's playing a gay character in the film, but precisely because she's playing it so well. And some will be more angry than gossipy: A lot of folks don't want to see the real Dana Owens, let alone Dana-as-Cleo. A lot of people love that illustrious girl in the crown. Need her, even.

"They can take *it* to the limit," Latifah says. "But they can't take *me* to the limit. I'm not going to even answer the question. I'm going to let you wonder, think whatever you want to think." Latifah leans up over the recorder, tilts her hat back on her head. "I don't really care about what you all think personally of me. I know who I am. I'm not confused about myself. Never."

She says, like she's disgusted with the fact, that everybody always asks Dennis Rodman if he's gay or not. "What he's doing behind closed doors has nothing to do with what he's doing on that court," she says. "He gets the same accolades and has brought more attention to the team. So the question is, Does Dennis believe in himself?" She's talking a mile a minute. "Dana believes in *her*self," she says, using her given name one of the few times during our time together. "So I can go out there and do something absolutely *not* me."

Though she said she wasn't going to answer the question, she does before I ask it. "I'm not a dyke," she says. "That's what Cleo is. Men's drawers, the whole nine—she's selling herself that way. Not me. *I did my job*. And I fear not. I fear not. I've prayed on this," she says, like she's talking about one of the most important decisions of her life. "I've talked to God on this. I talked to my father about it. I talked to my mother. And as long as my family supported my decision, what do I care?"

Pinkett (who folks also like to call a lesbian when they're bored, though she is now in a very public relationship with Will Smith) says she wanted the part of Cleo for herself—"It's a role with risk," she says. "Black people are extremely homophobic. We don't know how to react to it—don't know what it *is*. But that's why [actors] do what we do—to give people food for thought. It'll give people a chance to talk about something they needed to talk about a long time ago."

I mention to her how bold Latifah was to take on the role and bolder still to not opt for a whole bunch of fading to black or mood lighting. I also mention how Will Smith, when he was working on 1993's *Six Degrees of Separation*, decided to go the fade-to-black route (Denzel Washington having encouraged Smith's decision not to kiss another male onscreen). "Will says now he wishes he would have gone all the way," says Pinkett. "He was young then, and it takes a minute to know that if you're gonna do it, you're gonna do it."

Heavy D may have given Latifah some advice on the topic as well. He sure is qualified to: as one of Latifah's best friends, he, like her, is an MC, a label executive (president of Uptown Records), and an actor. He appeared to much acclaim on the 1993 season of Fox's now-canceled *Roc*, and was nominated for a 1996 Drama Desk award for his performance opposite Laurence Fishburne in the off-off-Broadway production of Fishburne's drama, *Riff Raff*.

Heavy says rapper to actor is a natural course. "There's something about being any kind of entertainer that is acting. You have to put on a show. Things you wouldn't do in your life, you do on stage. You have to let go," he says. "And that's extra hard for rappers," he says with a small laugh. "We have a tendency to, quote, unquote, keep it real. As an actor, you have to be able to humiliate yourself. Do whatever it takes."

> *If you don't want a strong woman, you don't want me. I'm going to give you space, trust, the benefit of the doubt. But I'm not stupid, so if you screw up, I won't take you back. And it's going to hurt you to not have me....*
>
> *I haven't had a lot of serious relationships in my life....And the people I've tended to be with over the years are people I knew when I was younger, and I keep them in a place where I'm, like, okay, maybe I'll wind up marrying him, or him, or him. If I could get a guy to look at me as his sister, then he wouldn't think about doing half the things that he might normally do, because how could you do that to your sister? If I could get a guy to think that way about me, then he's one I'd want.*

The folks at Avery Fisher Hall are looking at us in the nicest way, but with that smile that says we need to be going. Latifah's already up, adjusting her cap, about to step into the black Mercedes Benz 450 SEL (with driver) that she offhandedly calls "the company car." Queen La is flying back to L.A. the next day to shoot a new opening sequence for *Living Single*. She gots, she says, to go. No doubt that crown, though invisible now, is heavy on her head.

Plus, Latifah's still trying to make her basketball game. She's told me, any number of times, how important it is to her. "I like to drive," she says. "Shoot the short jumper." We're chatting on our way to her car, but she's mentally letting go of our conversation, her mind's already on the court. "I'm a defensive player," she says. "I'll tangle your ass up—I got a body. I'll put it on you. I'm the Dennis Rodman sort of player. I'll get a couple of points, no doubt. But I play the game to be active—that's it. It's been a love," she says, "and it's cool because on the basketball court I'm not the best."

There's a scene in *Set It Off* where Cleo is frantic and terrified. There's a cigarette involved, and a car, and the rest is all Cleo, resigned but still rebellious, thinking of everyone but herself. She decides, after all, that she is expendable. It's a moment of remarkable acting. It is also Dana Owens, ass out, armor down. Doing, as her friend Heavy says, "whatever it takes."

"In life I have to aspire to be the best," Latifah says. "On the court I'm not the star. The pressure's not on me." On the court, as in life, Dana Owens keeps up her defenses, she keeps on winning, and we keep on cheering. "*I feel good about it*," is what she says of her game, of holding those arms up, blocking, always watching, careful to keep people away from her crew—relentlessly careful to keep people away from her. Sounds like a whole lot of work. I'd be tired.

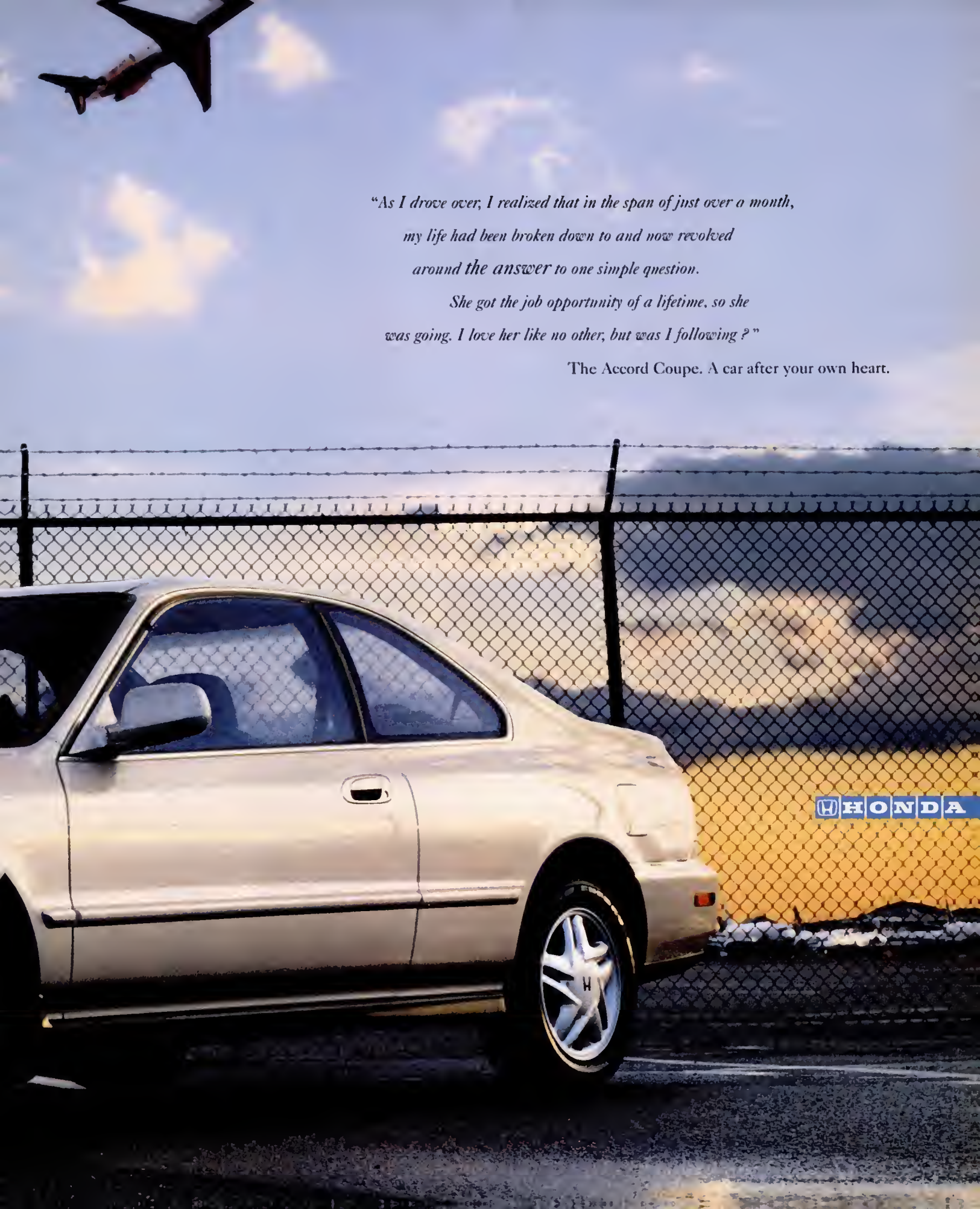
But then, I ain't a Queen.


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KEITH MURRAY

Wild style

"Writing a phat rhyme is like taking a shit, nigga!" exclaims Keith Murray. "Like, when you can't wait to get to a bathroom, you gotta dip into a restaurant or something. Write the phat shit, you be, like, 'Aaaahhhh....' "

Murray became a hip hop household name in 1994 thanks to the effervescent Isley Brothers groove of his debut hit, "The Most Beautifullest Thing in This World," and the accompanying album of the same name. A penchant for multisyllabic words and an attitude that would leave Travis Bickle shook were his weapons of choice, which proved a double-edged dagger in the arena of public perception.

"The way I come across scares people," Keith admits disappointedly. "Don't get me wrong, I carry guns when it's possible. I talk it half the time too. But I also make niggas know, lyrically, I will *embarrass* you."

In an unexpectedly dry year for hip hop, Murray's second LP, *Enigma*, is an oasis of stylishly raw, highly entertaining battle rhymes. It's easy to hear the younger, even-more-hyper Keith in these tracks: the MC Shan fan who was excused from math to rhyme in front of the class; who did his first bid after "lacing" an individual "ear-to-ear" in defense of his moms's honor; who joy-rode with his boys in a hooptie, following EPMD's tour buses "with pockets full of money and crack"; and who now shakes his head in disgust when others refuse to back up their talk with action.

"I thought niggas *expect* you to wild: I don't just be on record talkin' shit. There's rappers out there I smacked the shit out of—*already*. Niggas get on the radio actin' like *they* smacked *you*."

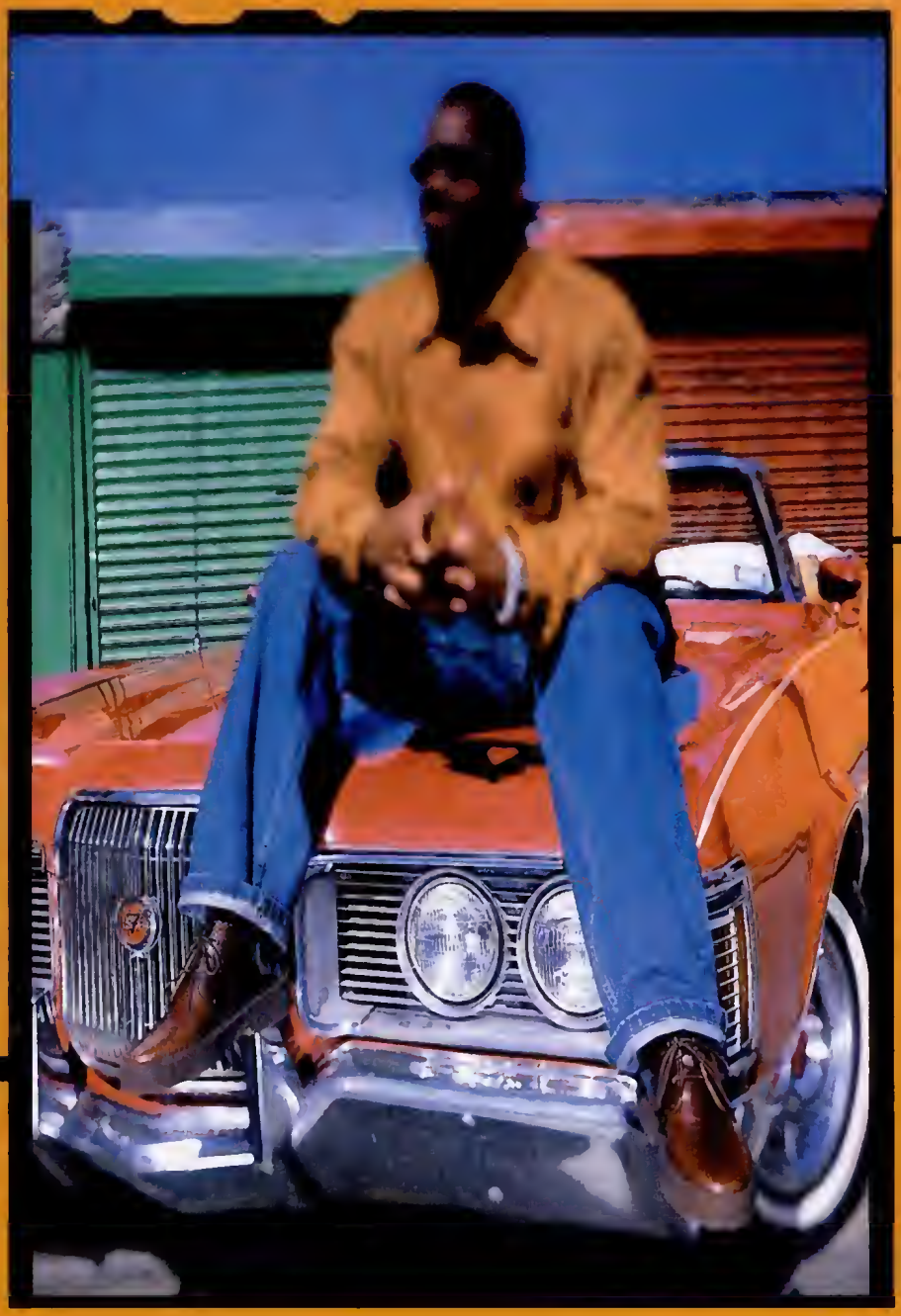
All in the name of entertainment, right?

"I know," he says calmly. "But being an entertainer is one thing, being a person is another. I got that 'I don't give a fuck' attitude, but I also let the world know I know what's goin' on, and I always try to better myself. When people see you trying to do good, they like that, you know."

Chairman Mao

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL HASTINGS

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trip \trip\ *vb* 1. to dance, skip; 2. to make a journey; 3. to get high on a psychedelic drug.
hop \häp\ *vb* 1. to move in a quick, springy leap; 2. to make a quick trip; 3. to drug or stimulate with drugs.
trip hop \trip häp\ *n* 1. a combination of hip hop, techno, dancehall, acid jazz, house, club, and soul music; 2. a British-based underground sound that combines electronic drums, radiant strings, breathy divas, breakbeats, and echo chambers; 3. description of artists, such as Björk, Goldie, Everything but the Girl, and DJ Spooky, who create the various hybrids of the genre—jungle, ambient, dub—that is taking the world by storm.

DJ SPOOKY
a.k.a. Paul Miller; 25; sci-fi writer, musicmaker, conceptual artist, DJ; Downtown New York City resident. Albums: *Songs of a Dead Dreamer* and *Necropolis*. Describes his sound as "science fiction hip hop, hardcore dub, post-symbolic mood sculpture."

Gray fleece Buechler shirt by Mecca, U.S.A.



BJÖRK
Born Björk Gudmundsdóttir
in Reykjavik, Iceland; 31; former lead
singer of the Sugarcubes.
Albums: *Debut* and *Post*.
"I want my music to sound like daily
life. All those unpredictable, outrageous
situations that we get ourselves into."

Yellow quilted coat by W&LT



Ben Watt; 34; producer, keyboardist; and Tracey Thorn; 34; singer, guitarist; officially became a group in 1984.
Albums: *Eden, Everything but the Girl, Love Not Money, Baby, the Stars Shine Bright, Idlewild, The Language of Life, Worldwide, Acoustics, Essence and Rare, Home Movies, Amplified Heart,* and *Walking Wounded.*
"These days, our music is intense, beat-driven songs. Next year, who knows?"

(Watt): Yellow ribbed sweater by Diesel; cotton indigo jean by A.P.C. (Thorn): red lycra jersey crossback tank and navy lycra unitard, both by tommy by Tommy Hilfiger


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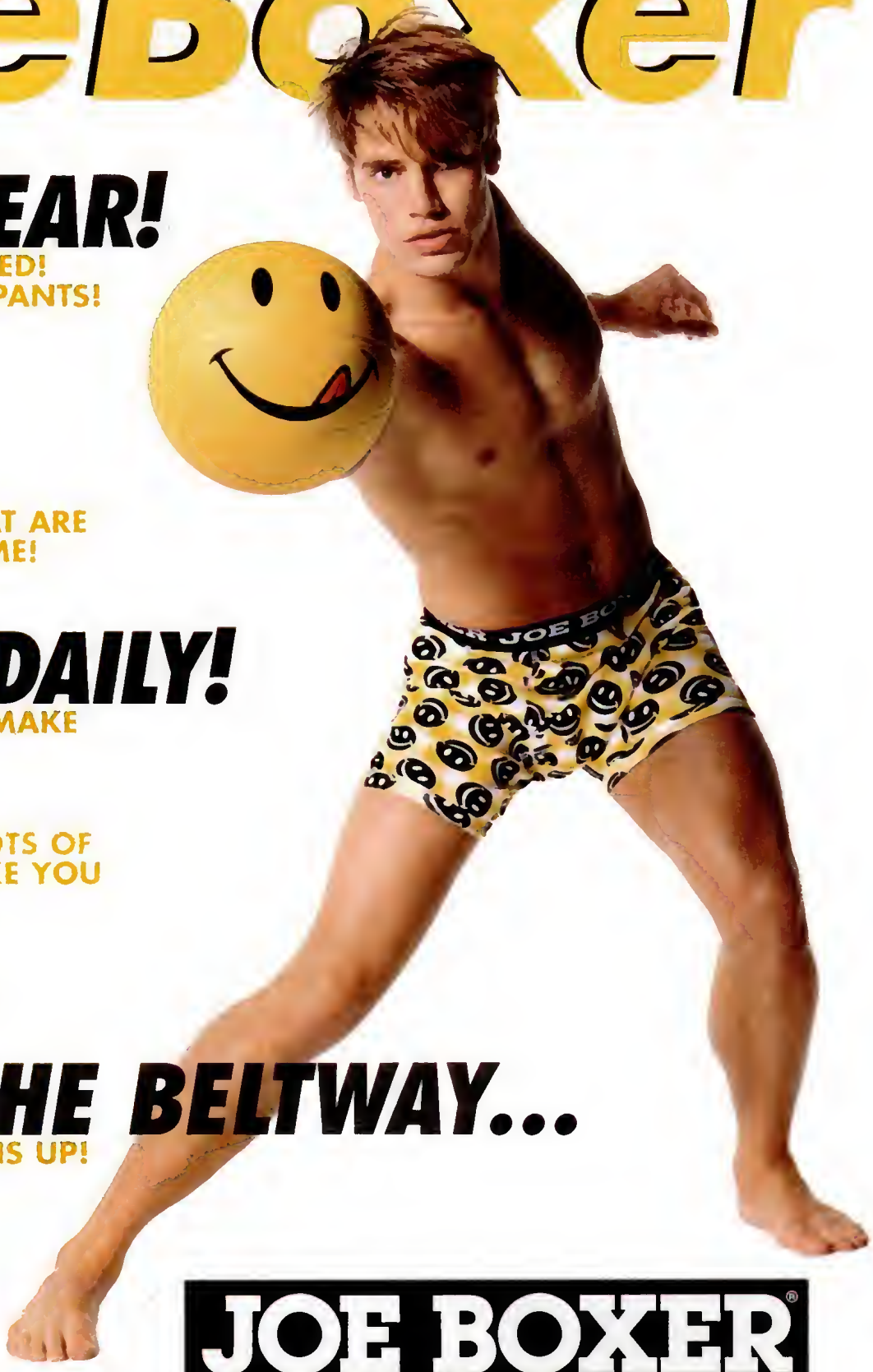
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REWIND '96

VIBE LOOKS BACK AT THE YEAR IN MUSIC, SPORT, FILM, FASHION, AND LOVE



Foxy Brown

MICHAEL LAVINE

HEAR THEM ROAR

Let 1996 stand as the year we finally bury the demeaning term "Female MC." Thanks to platinum sales and critically acclaimed wiles, women who hold microphones should now be referred to simply as MCs. Test them and they'll pull a lyrical Lorena Bobbit on you. So don't sleep. ***David Bry***

Lauryn Hill *A siren's voice and Ivy League lyrics.*

The Ill Nana, Foxy Brown *A walk-in closet full of designer brand names.*

MC Lyte *Ruffneck, tough, Juicy Fruit sweet.*



Bahamadia

FIDTH SPIONA

Little Kim *Talks dirtier than Girl 6.*

LeShaun *Gives a breathy guest job and makes it bounce (and she'll sue your ass too).*

Heather B. *Illtown street smarts, earth-shaking beats, and a deep-belly delivery.*

Bahamadia *Nimble-tongued metaphors and true-school cred.*

Missy Elliott *A mynah bird's flair for mimicry and repetitive repetition.*



MC Lyte

MICHAEL S. MEEH





Treach and Pepa

Goldie and Björk



Seal and Tyra

LOVERS

Love was certainly in the air this year. Here's a look at those who got together and the less fortunate ones who called it quits.

HOOKUPS:

Tisha Campbell and Duane Martin
Let's hope their marriage will at least (1) last longer than Out All Night, *the sitcom Duane costarred in, and (2) have more depth than* Martin.

Treach and Pepa
Still hip hop's first couple; their on-again, off-again romance—back on this year—is a real soap opera. Will we read a shocking tell-all book from Pepa in about 10 years? Hope so.

Mary J. Blige and Case
Hip hop soul singer Blige and crooner Case seem to be happier than ever—wish we could say the same for K-Ci of Jodeci.

Brandy and Kobe Bryant
Apparently our sweet and innocent little Brandy is growing up. She had her first date this year when she and prep basketball star turned Los Angeles Laker Kobe Bryant went to his prom.

Tatyana Ali and Jonathan Brandis
A match made in TV heaven: Ali, 17, of the now defunct Fresh Prince of Bel-Air *hooked up with Jonathan Brandis, 20, of* seaQuest DSV. *They'll soon star in a new series,* Fall Into Darkness.

Jada Pinkett and Will Smith
By now everybody knows about our favorite Hollywood couple who we hear will soon tie the knot.

Chanté Moore and Kadeem Hardison
The pregnant chanteuse and her big-screen fiancé may soon follow Pinkett and Smith down the aisle.

Tyra Banks and Seal
In what looked like a supersexy match, the supermodel got hot and heavy with the Nigerian-born soul singer...

BREAKUPS:

Tyra Banks and Seal
...But before we could even wonder whether Seal would craft a singing career for Tyra the way John Singleton got her into acting, the romance fizzled.

Goldie and Björk
Ain't love a trip? Less than a year after they hooked up, Goldie and Björk are calling it splits. Did this have anything to do with the backstage brawl between Goldie and Tricky that she had to break up?

Mary J. Blige and K-Ci
We hear K-Ci is finding it hard to let go. (See Mary J. Blige and Case, left.)

Arnell Simpson and Treach
Simpson lost Treach—or vice versa—about as quickly as the jury decided to acquit her dad.

Halle Berry and David Justice
Ended their three-year marriage last April. This sister's been through enough—she should just be alone for a while; it's time to exhale.

Biggie and Faith
Big Poppa and the original Big Momma separated after a two-year marriage. Tupac and Little Kim aside, this union obviously wasn't meant to be.

Biggie and Little Kim
This one didn't last long either.

SKIN FLICKS

Black and white folks make nice

Melting pot, schmelting pot. If the aftermath of the O.J. trial taught us anything, it's that *No, we can't all "just" get along.* That's a scary revelation for most, and one which Hollywood responded to this year by churning out fantasies of interracial harmony. In film after film, black and white costars came together to fight for truth, justice, and the American way. And we ate it up, making *A Time to Kill* (Sam Jackson/Matthew McConaughey), *Eraser* (Vanessa Williams/Arnold Schwarzenegger), and *Courage Under Fire* (Denzel Washington/Meg Ryan) among the top-grossing movies of '96.

None of these flicks was more telling, however, than the $286 million-grossing *Independence Day*, in which Will Smith and Jeff Goldblum did their bit to keep hope alive. When Smith and Goldblum zoom off in a supersonic spaceship to wipe out the evil aliens who want to destroy earth, the brotherman finds that the mensch has failed to fill him in on all the details of the mission. "We're gonna have to work on our communication skills," runs Smith's loaded comment. After they blow the aliens to smithereens and save the world, Goldblum leans over, squeezes Smith's shoulder, and says, "I love you, man."

All that's missing is a Bud Light.

Carter Harris



A Time to Kill



Independence Day

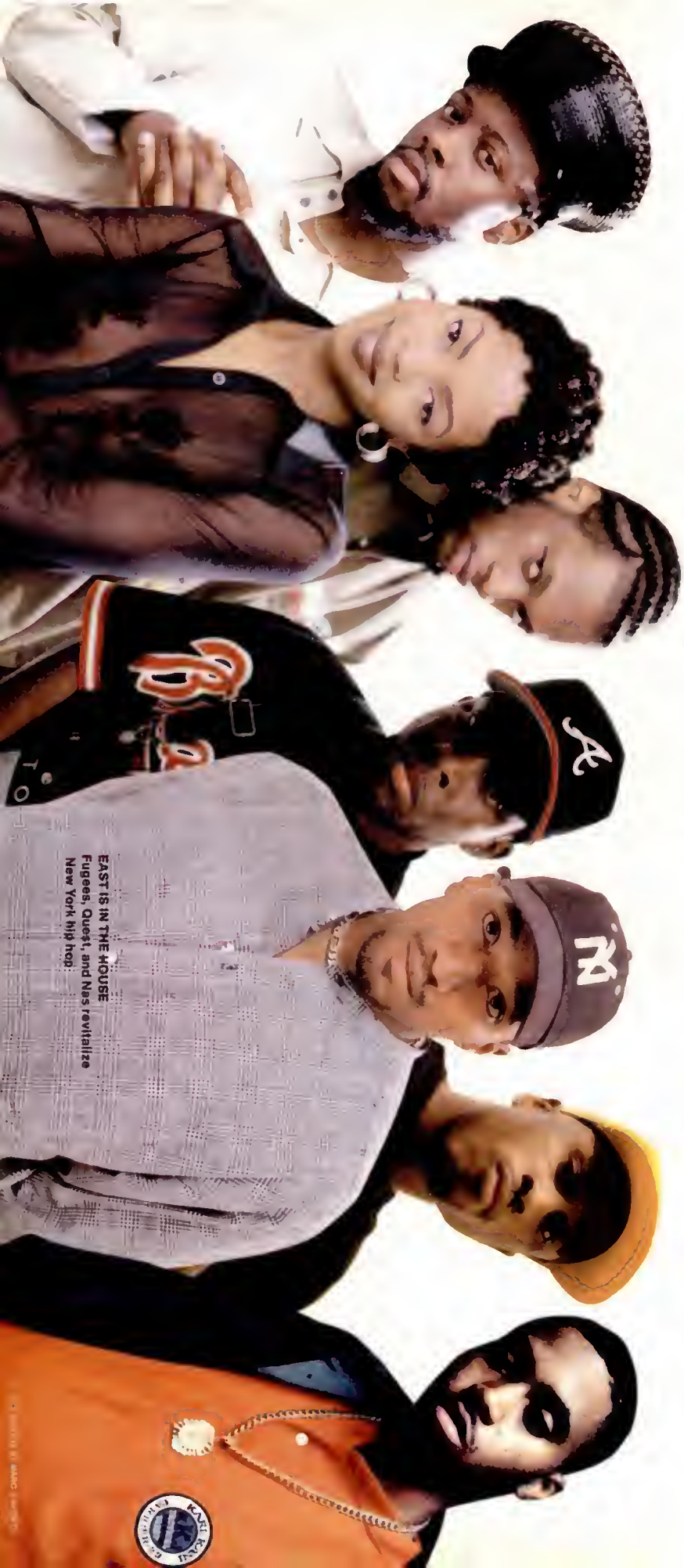


Eraser

NAME BRAND

Like rappers giving themselves shout-outs, this year designers started dropping their own names all over. In the era of Big Willie–style and ghetto fabulousness, high-style and *expensive* logos—the fashion equivalent of fat-marker tagups—have found their way onto, well, everything. Belts are just the latest way for designers to turn fashion-forward consumers into walking billboards.

Emil Wilbekin



EAST IS IN THE HOUSE
Fugees, Quest, and Nas revitalize New York hip hop



Tiger Woods

PEACE SIGNS

Is hip hop's East-West rivalry coming to an end?

Niggaz been rappin' since the '70s
And still ain't gone gold
—"Westside Slaughterhouse," Mack 10, Ice Cube, and WC on East Coast rappers

West Coast rappers go platinum in a second
'Cause West Coast niggas go out and buy records
But East Coast rappers be on conceited shit
The wack MCs here make repeated hits
They get starstruck and stop givin' a fuck
And lyrically half these niggas suck
—"New York Love (All Eyez on Sun)," Doo Wop & Sun Dullah

Though good old-fashioned machismo and hometown pride factor into hip hop's never-ending East-West conflict, record sales are truly at the root of the rivalry. As a quick glance at *Billboard* charts past confirms, most of hip hop's biggest sellers dwell thousands of miles from the Boogie Down Bronx parks where Kool Herc first worked the tables. In recent years, MC Hammer, 2Pac, Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, and others have gotten California Love in the multimillions, while rappers from Houston, Cleveland, and Atlanta have developed their own lucrative fan bases. Meanwhile, East Coast artists have suffered from a dire lack of gold and platinum sales.

Until recently, that is. Not only did the Fugees, Nas, and A Tribe Called Quest all debut at No. 1 on the charts this year, they sold big. At press time, the Fugees' *The Score* had cleared five million, Nas's *It Was Written* hit double platinum, and Tribe was nearing gold after eight weeks. But while hip hop's Eastside representatives may be undergoing a renaissance in national popularity—first sparked in 1995 by the success of Wu-Tang and Biggie—could this newfound sales parity (along with the reality check of Tupac's demise) signal the end of East-West animosity as we know it?

An unprecedented spate of bicoastal collaborations suggests a move in this direction. Quest and the Fugees each helped do remixes for Cypress Hill's *Unreleased & Revamped* EP. Tha Dogg Pound (who previously dissed the Big Apple on record) rapped with the Lost Boyz on their "Music Makes Me High" remix, and Dr. Dre brought together KRS-One, Nas, B-Real, and RBX for the Group Therapy cut "East Coast/West Coast Killas." Upcoming developments such as Dre's reported signing of Nas's crew, the Firm, and the Boot Camp Clik's work with Tupac (shortly before he died) on a project called *One Nation* fly in the face of hip hop's preoccupation with superficial East-West differences.

Some, of course, prefer to keep the home fires burning. Besides the anti-East sentiments spewed by L.A. supergroup Westside Connection (composed of Ice Cube, Mack 10, and WC) on their debut album, *Bow Down* (Priority), there are a host of nasty personal attacks being lobbed cross-country: Royal Flush's Dogg Pound–answer record "Worldwide"; Common's response to Ice Cube "The Bitch in Yoo"; and Mobb Deep's suddenly creepy anti-Tupac diatribe "Drop a Gem."

As always, though, it all comes down to the money. If the latest shots at unification don't sell, you'll find these feel-good projects abandoned as quickly as other long-gone subgenres like hip house, kiddie rap, and bilingual lyricists. Ultimately, rapping with the next man may never be as reliable as bigging up your hometown.

Chairman Mao



Lisa Leslie

MICHAEL GAYLORD



Michael Johnson

BALLERS

It may not have seemed like it, but sports in 1996 wasn't *all* about the *Fortune* 500 salaries of NBA superstars, the chaotic hype-fest that was the Summer Olympics, or the omnipresent swoosh—the symbol of Nike imperialism. Some athletes actually made headlines *on* the field. Here are some that we'd pay to see anytime, anywhere.

Joseph V. Tirella

Tiger Woods, golf savior
It might be too much to have the future of a sport in your hands, but his $40-million deal with Nike should help ease the burden.

Allen Iverson, Philadelphia 76ers franchise point guard
The Georgetown soph with the sweet J—and whose D is tighter than a pair of Daisy Dukes—steps to the show.

Michael Johnson, classy Olympic sprinter
He marched into Atlanta's Olympic stadium wearing two gold sneakers and departed two weeks later with two gold medals.

Lisa Leslie, Olympic glam slammer
Lighting up the scoreboard wasn't enough for this six-foot-five tower of power—and glamour. After appearing in a Vogue fashion spread, she signed a lucrative modeling contract, and even rocked her basketball gold medal on the fashion runway. Fierce.

Muhammad Ali, legend
We didn't need a TV movie to remind us that he's still the greatest. But we'll never forget the courageous moment when—alone and trembling before the whole world—he sparked the Olympic torch.

DÉJÀ VU

"Ain't nothing like the real thing, baby," Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell sang in 1968, but try telling that to today's crop of hip hop and R&B stars. The nine-six was covered well to wall with remakes. Here's a look at the new spins on some old standards—and how they measured up.

Omoronke Idowu

D'Angelo (Smokey Robinson)
"Cruisin' "
Old green eyes must be proud.

Diana Ross (Gloria Gaynor)
"I Will Survive"
La Ross has earned the right to cover enyone she damn well pleases.

Jaÿ-Z & Foxy Brown (Four Tops)
"Ain't No Nigga" ("Ain't No Woman")
Crude-but-chunky spin on e heartfelt ballad.

Mary J. Blige (Rufus featuring Chaka Khan) "Everlasting Love"
Couldn't hit Chaka's notes in her dreams.

Faith & Mary J. Blige (Rose Royce)
"Love Don't Live Here Anymore"
The gals let loose real soulful juice.

Groove Theory (Todd Rundgren, by way of the Isley Brothers)
"Hello It's Me"
More gentle-spirited than the first.

Aaliyah (Isley Brothers)
"Choosey Lover"
Give her an A for effort.

Aaliyah (Marvin Gaye)
"Got to Give It Up"
Aaliyah should have given it up.

Erykah Badu & D'Angelo (Marvin Gaye & Tammi Terrell)
"Your Precious Love"
Lick-for-lick bite of the original.

Smooth (Al Green)
"Love and Happiness"
Eerily off-key and in need of Rev. Al.

Soul for Real (Al Green)
"Let's Stay Together"
The boys should try again when they're men.

Eric Benét (Sly & the Family Stone)
"If You Want Me to Stay"
Lacks Sly's earthy funk.

L.L. Cool J (Bernard Wright)
"Loungin' "/"Who Do You Love"
Jeep-blastin' reincarnation.

Babyface with L.L. Cool J (Shalamar) "For the Lover in You"
Cool, but L.L.'s ad-libs aren't necessary. See original.

Adina Howard (Tina Turner)
"What's Love Got to Do With It?"
She's kidding, right?

Nas (Eurythmics)
"Street Dreams" ("Sweet Dreams")
Hip hop et its funkiest.

Nas (Kurtis Blow)
"If I Ruled the World"
Actuelly outdoes the original.

H-Town (The Persuaders) "Thin Line Between Love & Hate"
Still e heartstrings tugger.

Donell Jones (Stevie Wonder)
"Knocks Me off My Feet"
Not up to the challenge.

Luther Vandross (Stevie Wonder)
"Knocks Me off My Feet"
Luther makes this own—a joy.

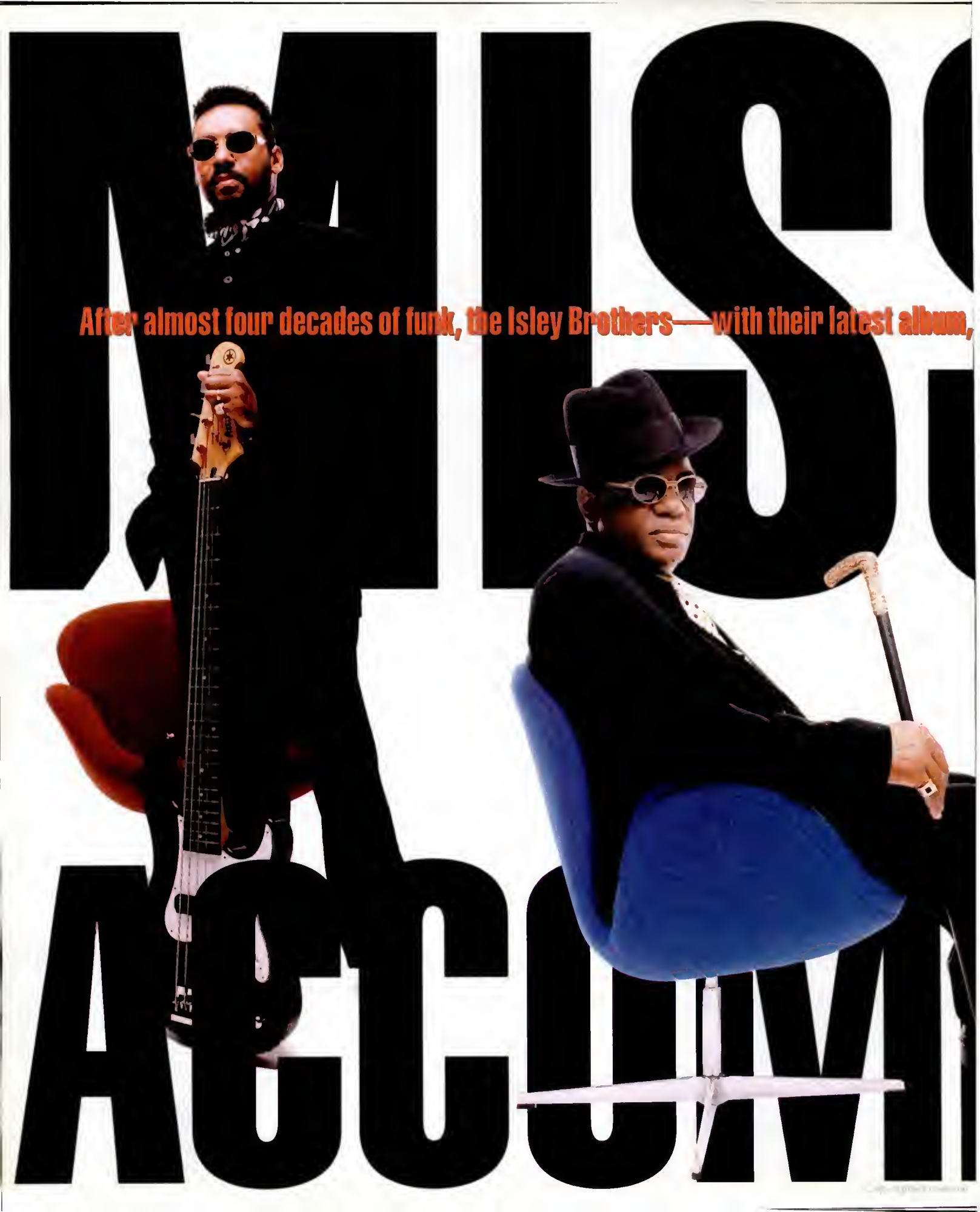


From left: Smokey, Gloria, Sly

ENOUGH ALREADY...

of what Wal-Mart will or will not carry in their stores...of calling women *mami*...of wack Web sites for things that don't need them...of guns...of songs about designer clothes...of "real-life" cop shows...of dumb skits on rap albums.....of only one pant leg rolled up to the knee...of pastel Hush Puppies...of champagne-sipping money fakers...of coastal wars...of reggae songs with played-out hip hop remixes...of mix tape DJs who talk through the whole damn tape...of gold fronts...of the Macarena...of racial intolerance...of inadequate foes for Mike Tyson...of ♱'s erratic output over the past few years...of "don't go there"...of Alanis Morissette (though it's not her fault MTV overplayed her)...of the lack of decent black drama on TV...of video hoes and the men who love them....of shows that bite the *X-Files*...of glamorous heroin hype...of keepin' it real...of rappers going bankrupt...of "Downtown" Julie Brown and her tired gossip show...of people who dissed Tupac riding his jock posthumously.

MISS

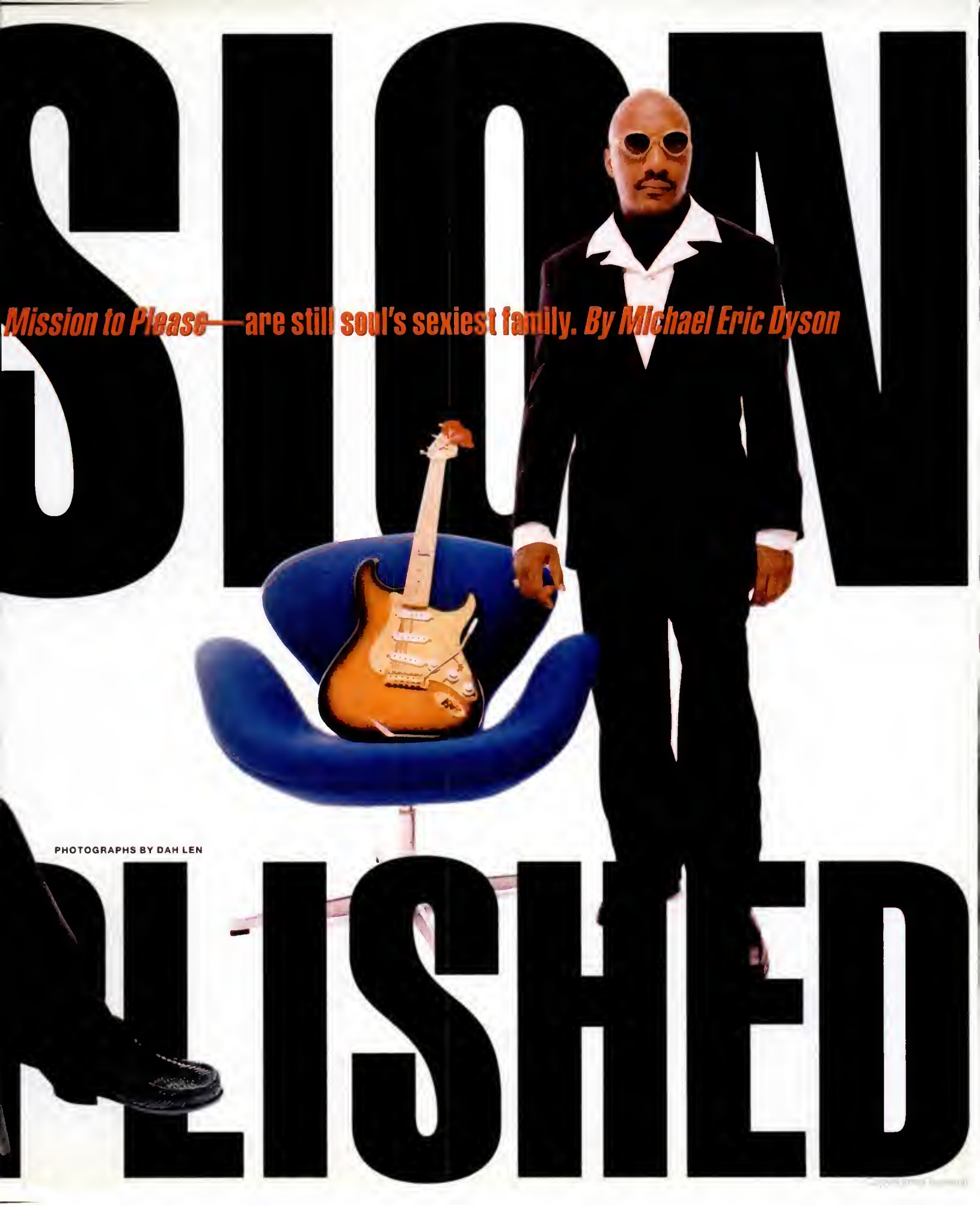


After almost four decades of funk, the Isley Brothers—with their latest album,

ACCUM

SLICK

Mission to Please—are still soul's sexiest family. *By Michael Eric Dyson*



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAH LEN

ISHED

Ooh, that's Mr. Biggs," the young black housekeeper coos as she and her coworker spot Ronald Isley approaching an elevator in a Hampton, Va. hotel.

"No, it ain't, girl," the coworker whispers, half disbelieving, half hoping it might be true. After all, how likely is it that they'd see an R&B legend—who, after nearly 40 years in the business, is perhaps best known these days for his role as crime kingpin Mr. Biggs in R. Kelly's "Down Low (Nobody Has to Know)" video—traipsing through their terrain?

All the while, Isley, 55, glides through the hotel hallway as smoothly as one of his sensuous ballads. His white jogging suit sets off his glowing chocolate face and immaculately preened jet-black locks. A scaled-down version of his crew is in tow—his wife, sultry songstress Angela Winbush; their assistant; guitar-legend brother Ernie, 44, with his daughter, Alexandra; and a record label executive. (Brother Marvin, 43, the Isleys' bassist and percussionist, is home sick.)

But faster than you can say "Fight the Power"—nah, not Public Enemy's summer of '89 anthem, but the Isley Brothers' 1975 smash—Isley gives away his secret with an impish, hammy come-on.

"Yeah, I'm Mr. Biggs," he purrs in mock hipness as he steps into the elevator.

As the doors close, Isley flicks on his dark shades and flashes a mega-kilowatt smile. The elevator may be going down, but the Isley Brothers' fortunes—thanks in part to Mr. Biggs—are going nowhere but up.

Some soul masters from the old school might resent the minor musical roads they have to travel to regain popularity: having a snatch of your voice or a lick of your guitar sampled on a hip hop joint; adding vocal flourishes to a new star's hit single; or making a for-old-time's-sake cameo appearance in a video. But the Isleys aren't your typical legends. They're not content to sit on their assets, heads swollen from decades of praise. The group are still hungry.

They may have sailed into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame alongside former band member Jimi Hendrix, but the Isley Brothers are still hustling to win new fans with their magical blend of sex and soul. And they've still got the touch: This year's already gold *Mission to Please* (their first studio album in four years) is the group's first bona fide hit since 1983's *Between the Sheets*.

"[The durability of our music] is really a gift from the Lord," Ron says as he kicks back on the sofa in his luxury hotel suite. "And the competitiveness from wanting to be first. I don't know what we would do if we couldn't do music."

The hunger has brought the Isleys South to headline a '70s soul night at the Hampton Jazz Festival, on a bill that includes Isaac Hayes, Millie Jackson, and Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes. And the love has kept them going for nearly four decades, stretching from 1959's "Shout," the archetypal rhythm and blues record, to this year's "Let's Lay Together," a lovely '90s update of the Isleys' signature sound: Ron's haunting falsetto arching over a sweet melody surrounded by velvet, undulating grooves.

That Isley sound, enhanced by Ernie's wicked wah-wahs and stinging, soaring guitar riffs, has provided the rhythmic bottom for countless hip hop tracks—from A Tribe Called Quest's "Bonita Applebum" and the Notorious B.I.G.'s "Big Poppa" to Bone Thugs-N-Harmony's "Tha Crossroads." And as an R&B band—a self-contained musical force that has shown that rock, soul, funk, and gospel go together as naturally as the blindness and bigotry that prevent such a recognition—the Isleys are also the musical foreparents of D'Angelo and Dionne Farris, of Prince and Maxwell.

But if the Isley sound is sprinkled over the fragmented sonic landscape of urban music—"Between the Sheets" is perhaps the most sampled song in contemporary rap—their influence washes most thoroughly over records by Jodeci, Keith Sweat, and especially R. Kelly's tightly wound grooves, his yearning, pleading vocals, and his obsession with making the flesh obey the spirit.

But Kelly hasn't just hit the Isleys up for ideas. He made the next step, one that is as often overlooked as the artists who inspire young Turks: He went back to the source to see what they have to say now.

The Isleys have provided the bottom for countless hip hop tracks—and the inspiration for R&B from Prince to D'Angelo.

"Kelly had taken off on some of our stuff with the album *12 Play*," Ron explains. (In fact, Kelly's remix of "Bump n' Grind" contains a dead-on reprise of the lilting melody from the Isleys' "Make Me Say It Again Girl.") After bringing in Ron to harmonize on "Down Low," Kelly was really inspired.

"He said, 'I wanna be involved in y'all's next album,' " Ron says. "I said, Cool, man. Let's write some songs and get in the studio and throw down." They did just that, resulting in three numbers on *Mission to Please*. "When I started singing, R. Kelly fell all out on the floor, saying, 'I can't believe this. It's really him,' " Ron says, his eyes dancing with obvious pride. "He paid me my props and all that. I just love that out of young people."

If respect is based on talent and tenacity, then the Isleys deserve mad props indeed. They're true soul survivors who've weathered their share of personal and professional heartaches on the way to becoming pop icons. Reared in Cincinnati, the Isley boys—six in all—were almost literally born in rhythm. Their father was a former vaudevillian; their mother, a church choir director and music teacher.

"When I was two years old, my mother and father wanted a quartet," Ron recalls. The oldest brothers—Rudolph, Ronald, O'Kelly, and Vernon—sang gospel music in local churches in the early '50s, but after Vernon was killed in a bicycle accident in 1955, the foursome broke up.

A year later, Ronald, O'Kelly, and Rudolph teamed up again, expanding their repertoire to include everything from Dinah Washington to Frank Sinatra. They won several local talent contests, and were encouraged to go to New York by, among others, rhythm and blues legend Clyde McPhatter. The Isleys journeyed to the city in 1957, recording several singles for independent labels that failed to make any noise. In 1959 Howard Bloom of RCA Records caught an Isley performance at the Howard Theater in Washington, D.C. and signed them immediately. Their first record, "Turn Me On," bombed, despite the work of Sam Cooke's former producers Hugo & Luigi.

The follow-up, though, titled "Shout," not only sold more than 1 million copies but also helped shape the direction of black pop music. "Shout" turned loose on the secular world the unfiltered zeal and frenetic passion of black gospel music. And like Cooke and Ray Charles before them, the Isleys came under attack from the black religious world.

"A lot of the churches at the time called the radio stations," Ron recalls, "[saying] 'I don't know if it's right for them to be doing that song "Shout"....People are shouting on a song that's not a gospel song.' " Of course, "Shout" is now a classic, as is the Isleys' 1962 single "Twist and Shout," which has been covered most prominently by the Beatles (who most pop listeners probably assume wrote the song).

The Isleys followed with a string of lackluster singles for a series of record companies—Atlantic, Wand, and United Artists. After their relationship with United soured, the Isleys (who had since relocated to Teaneck, N.J.) formed their own label, punningly named T-Neck Records, in the early '60s.

The first version of T-Neck spawned a single, 1964's "Testify," which is important only because it's one of the first records on which Jimi Hendrix played. Jimi's influence on Ernie is obvious, but most people don't know how great an opportunity the younger Isley had to peep his idol's fretwork up close.

"He lived at the house," Ernie recalls animatedly, his yellow T-shirt and white jeans hugging his muscular frame as he snaps to attention on the couch in Ron's suite. "He was in the band for four years."

Because he was 10 years younger than Hendrix, Ernie never got the chance to study directly with the guitar wizard, but he soaked up the pyrotechnic vibes Hendrix sent rippling through the homeplace. "Basically, I would be peepin' around the hall while he was playing," Ernie says. "But Marvin was asking him everything he could think of," he adds with a grin. Still, the shadow of Hendrix's Stratocaster falls mightily on Ernie's majestic craft: the psychedelic, bluesy intensity of Ernie's long, lacerating licks on Isley ballads like 1973's "Summer Breeze"; his atmospheric, weeping phrases that jut just above the melody of mid-tempo grooves; and the dropkick-to-the-chest ferocity of his staccato picks on such up-tempo Isley jams as 1973's "That Lady."

It wasn't until 1969—after the Isleys had come and gone from Motown, where they enjoyed moderate success, and then revamped the T-Neck label and released the Grammy-winning "It's Your Thing"—that the addition of Ernie, Marvin, Isley brother-in-law/keyboardist Chris Jasper, (and drummer Everett Collins) made the group a soul septet, or, more to the point, a funk band. Although Ernie calls "It's Your Thing" the group's foundation, it didn't have enough kick to give them a distinct, recognizable sound.

Still, "It's Your Thing" was an important musical nod to the group's eventual direction. In the early '70s the Isley Brothers began to contribute their consider-







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MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES

FIGHTIN' THE POWER
"Our durability is a gift from the Lord," says Ron (center, with the Brothers in their '70s incarnation), "and the competitiveness of wanting to be first."

able skills to the funk revolution–joining General James Brown and Field Marshall Sly Stone and the genre's best weapon of attack, George Clinton's P-Funk Mothership. What the Isleys had in common with these and other funk groups is crucial, something often lost on today's heads: They weren't just a singing group, they were a *band*. And like all great funk bands, they wrote, produced, arranged, played, and sang their own material.

It was in 1973 that the Isley Brothers found their musical identity, their *sound*–and extraordinary commercial success to boot–with the release of 3+3, the first of 10 gold or platinum albums the band would release over the next decade. They damn near reinvented the soul ballad–taking apart its prepackaged sentimentality, rebuilding it from the ground up, and handing it back to us full of honest, edifying emotion in songs like "For the Love of You."

But their success couldn't stem the tide of trouble that eventually floods all groups blessed–and burdened–by longevity. When I ask Ron about the group's split in 1984–when Chris, Ernie, and Marvin formed their own band, Isley, Jasper, Isley–he's forthright about his and his older brothers' roles in the breakup.

"The older brothers [O'Kelly, Rudolph, and Ron], being like fathers to the younger brothers, didn't give them the attention we should have," Ron confesses. From Ernie's point of view, it all boiled down to "a lot of miscommunication and noncommunication" between the younger and older brothers. Whatever happened, it led to a bitter breakup that lasted nearly six years. (Marvin and Ernie returned to the fold in 1990). Isley, Jasper, Isley had two huge hits–"Caravan of Love" and "Insatiable Woman"–while the Isley Brothers wouldn't score again until "Smooth Sailin' Tonight" in 1987. In the meantime, the unexpected death of Kelly (who had dropped the "O' " from his name) in 1986 from a heart attack, at the age of 48, had a profound impact on the brothers.

"[When he passed] it was like somebody had reached inside me and pulled my living guts out," Ernie painfully remembers, gesturing with hands more familiar with stroking a guitar than pantomiming grief. "He was the center of the wheel, and after that the spokes started flying everywhere."

Rudolph decided to study for the ministry with his wife. He virtually gave up secular recording. Kelly's death hit Ron even harder. With Ernie, Chris, and Marvin in their own group, Ron was left all alone. Shortly afterward, he sought out Angela Winbush, then part of the R&B duo Rene and Angela (who were in the process of splitting), to produce tracks for the *Smooth Sailin'* album. Impressed by Winbush's vocal gifts, but especially by her songwriting and production skills, Isley discovered in her not only an enthusiastic fan but also a comforting shoulder and sympathetic ear.

"We started straightening each other's problems out," Ron says, as Winbush, seated next to him in a limo headed to one more in an endless series of radio interviews, blushes. Married three years ago, after a seven-year courtship, Isley and Winbush (who is about 20 years younger than her husband) are a deeply spiritual couple. After Kelly's death, Ron reclaimed his religious roots, returned to church, and now sprinkles his conversation with frequent references to "the Lord." But in hanging with Isley and Winbush, you don't get the sense–at least I didn't, and as a Baptist preacher my antennae are finely tuned–that when they're coming, as one wag put it, you're tempted to give three cheers for sin.

Ron claims not to feel any tension between his religious beliefs and his secular, sensual singing. "None whatsoever," he emphatically declares. "Because I always let the Lord know how appreciative I am for Him letting me do certain things. I want to use this instrument that He's given me to perform."

If that's the case, the Isleys performance that night–with Angela as one of the backup singers–is not only a family affair, it's a faithful exercise of their gifts as well. It really is, at the risk of sounding corny, a mission to please–with an emphasis on "mission."

When I meet the crew at the Hampton Coliseum, Ron is already dressed to the nines–shrouded in a black suit, black shirt, and black shoes, with his trademark cane in hand. Like a preacher before he delivers the word, he sits, for the most part, silent and alone, soaking up the energy that only his mind and soul can give to him. I go over to make small talk. He cordially obliges, but he's distracted, slightly distant. After all, he's getting ready to perform, and, in his own understanding, to serve. Since I know something about that sort of concentration, I leave him to his thoughts.

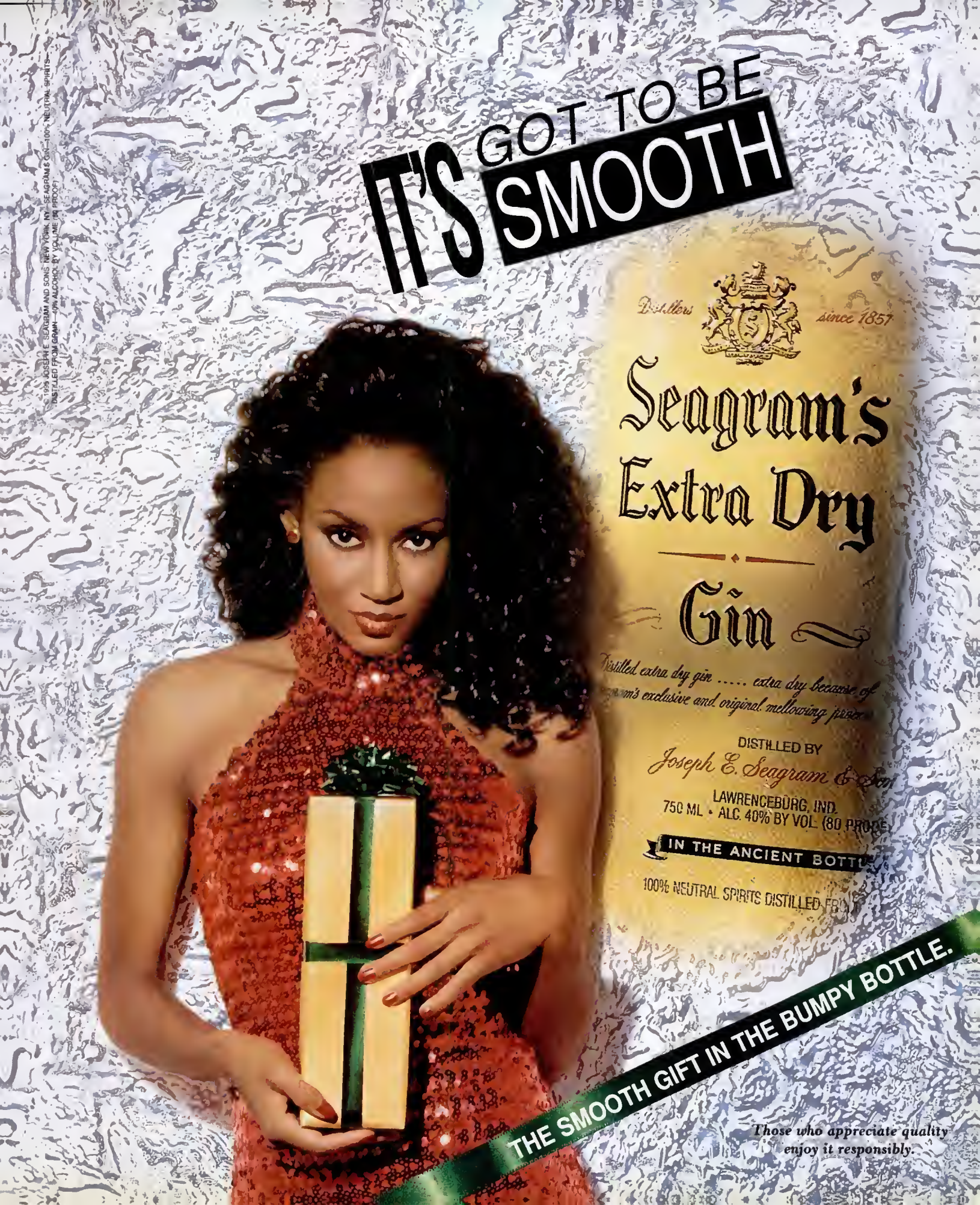
Minutes later, the Isleys are catching wreck on Hampton Coliseum's stage. Kicking off their 45-minute set with "Harvest for the World," they cruise through 10 of their biggest hits and crowd pleasers, including "Between the Sheets," which draws massive screams from the audience, and a jazzed-up version of the Todd Rundgren song, "Hello It's Me."

But after a grinding rendition of "Twist and Shout," the Isleys tear into "Shout," a surefire climax that winds gradually to the song's sanctified though hardly sanctimonious sentiments, only to uncoil in an orgy of hand clapping and foot stomping. And of course, the enraptured crowd mouths, even mimics, Ron's every vocal twist. And why shouldn't they? After all, this is one of pop music's enduring standards.

"Hey-ey-ey-ey," he calls.

"Hey-ey-ey-ey," the crowd hollers back.

At the peak of the frenzy, as the audience rhythmically assaults the air with their arms and hands, I briefly pause to think about Ron's desire to use his God-given talent to perform. He must be in heaven, I think, as I resume my enthusiastic responses to his gruffly voiced calls. And right about now, so am I. V


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E-40

Takin' the rap

Don't ever try to tell E-40 that he doesn't deserve his riches. The Vallejo, Calif.–based rapper and businessman has worked too hard to have some young buck question his efforts. Just ask rapper AZ and Portland Trail Blazers forward Rasheed Wallace. E-40 caught each of them speaking unfavorably about his talents and promptly answered with wrath and wit on "Record Haters," the opening song on his fourth solo album, *Tha Hall of Game*.

"These fools just don't know," says E-40. "[They need to go] through what we did—selling tapes ourselves, pressing the tapes with our own *scrilla*—instead of rapping at these record companies trying to get a deal overnight."

As fledgling artists, E-40 and his familial crew, the Click—brother B-Legit, cousin D-Shot, and sister Suga T.—were so confident their music was hittin' they started their own label, Sick-Wid-It Records, and gave away thousands of free copies of their first single. They then peddled their records from car trunks and backpacks and, with distribution help from their uncle's Solar Music Group company, moved 183,000 copies of their debut, *Down and Dirty*, and 117,000 of E-40's solo joint, *Federal*. Next came a lucrative distribution deal with Jive Records and two more E-40 albums—including the gold *In a Major Way*—making the Click the wealthiest rap family in what they call the Yay Area.

"It's the product," E-40 insists. "You could have all the business in the world, but without the product, it's not gonna work." Indeed, it's the way E-40 spits game-related tales over soul-induced melodies and his knack for [illegible] terms that's made his product so desired [illegible]

"Nowadays, [illegible] boasting," he says, [illegible] B-Legit [illegible] like a chair with a backrest. I don't know [illegible] like this thing, and they should [illegible] myself for a [illegible]



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GOT TO GIVE IT UP

Aaliyah's back—and moving forth as more than just an R. Kelly protégée. *By kris ex*

She's gonna take my fuckin' job!" shrieks Bill Bellamy to anyone willing to laugh in MTV's Manhattan studios. "I'ma have to punch her in her face!" During a taping of *MTV Jams*, Bellamy has played his usual role of host/interviewer with occasional irksome humor, only to be met at every turn by today's guest, 17-year-old Aaliyah Haughton. Reclining on steps that serve as their easy chairs, the Big Wilma in the making counters all the playful 'tude dished out by the comedian, serving up young-girl sass, snapping fingers, high fives, and rotating neck gestures.

Aside from a couple of technical mishaps, the show is effortlessly completed in one take, suggesting that the duo had spent all day fine-tuning their routine; but the two on-camera know it was actually just heavy improvisation. Bellamy turns to Aaliyah with a bug-eyed expression and full-toothed grin: "Girl, you too good!"

"I'm usually nervous," she confesses, then points to Bellamy, "But he makes it so easy."

After the taping, though, Aaliyah moves about the studio looking as unsure and insecure as the teenager she is. She's cordial yet restrained and almost always hid behind a pair of darkly tinted sunglasses. Her gear is simultaneously revealing and concealing: A black-lace Guess halter advertises a trim waist you can't pinch an inch on; two pairs of jeans (one skintight, the other baggy) hang off her hips and crumble down to layers of folds right above her black Gore-tex boots.

Aaliyah created the prototype for the '90s new jill teenage diva with her platinum-selling 1994 debut, *Age Ain't Nothing but a Number*. The album yielded a pair of gold singles, "Back and Forth" and "At Your Best (You Are Love)," which put Aaliyah's own spin on hip hop soul and went to Nos. 1 and 2, respectively, on the R&B charts. Success was truly in this girl's blood.

Her big break came when her uncle Barry Hankerson established the label Blackground Enterprises and signed Aaliyah as his first act prior to inking a distribution deal in 1993 with Jive/Zomba. (Blackground is now distributed through Atlantic.) Hankerson, who managed R. Kelly through his Midwest Entertainment Group, introduced the two singers, and Kelly took creative control of *Age*. "We finished the album in about eight or nine months," remembers Aaliyah. "It was cool. [Kelly's] very talented, so the songs just kept coming."

But the journey to the center of the spotlight hasn't been all smooth for the young songstress. In 1994, while in her second year of high school as a dance major at Detroit's High School for the Performing Arts, Aaliyah's alleged marriage to a man more than 10 years her senior had the music industry abuzz.

"It was a really hard time for me to get through, 'cause things were being said—negative things," says Aaliyah of the rumors that depicted her as either a doe-eyed victim of a cradle robber or a manipulative Lolita to R. Kelly's troubled genius. "I went out and toured, and I faced the adversity, which was rough for me."

Despite a marriage license issued in the state of Illinois saying an 18-year-old Aaliyah Haughton married Robert Kelly on August 31, 1994, Aaliyah answers further inquiries by stating, "I'm not married. That's all I really want to say about it. I like to handle the scandal, I don't let the scandal handle me." Yet, today, she seems emotionally detached from the controversy, recalling her side of the situation as if reciting an account of the battle of Waterloo for an oral report in history class.

"I don't like to go into the details on it, because it was a very... [*she pauses to clear her throat*] scandalous thing. I don't like to get into the details and add fuel to the fire. I had a lot of drama back then, and I don't really want any more. And out of respect for my family and what I went through, I just answer, I'm not married." Then she adds: "At all."

So, let's believe that she's not married (now) and consider her new album, *One in a Million*, whose producers include Jermaine Dupri, Kay Gee (from Naughty by Nature), Daryl Simmons, and rugged newcomer Timbaland. (Mr. Kelly is conspicuous by his absence.) While her competition's (Mary, Monifah, Monica, et al.) hip hop core is derived from breakbeats, Aaliyah's fresh sound is a brick-layered foundation with a rubbery synth-bass that incorporates actual old- school funk and R&B, not just old-school beats. *Million* deftly creates an unfolding landscape of distilled emotion as opposed to the pop-single fluff currently clouding up the airwaves.

The high school senior pulls off a major feat on a remake of Marvin Gaye's "Got to Give It Up" by placing her falsetto toe-to-toe against the liquid, overlapping rhyme scheme of hip hop's ultimate storyteller Slick Rick. And on cuts like "Heartbroken" and "Never Givin' Up," Aaliyah's vocal phrasings and self-penned lyrics make her sound sophisticated beyond her years.

"When I'm in the studio, I have to have the lights off—you can't see me 'cause I'm very shy," she admits later, lounging in a Manhattan sports café. "I don't mind seeing you in the control room, but you can't see me." Amid the café's pool tables, obstacle courses, video games, batting cages, and basketball hoops, no one—maybe not even Aaliyah herself—suspects that there's an international star in the house. But the star is presently smashing a journalist at a game of air hockey, after holding her own in a game of Ping-Pong against her cousin, Jomo Kenyatta Hankerson, vice president of Blackground Enterprises. Her competitiveness is a mix of the average teenager's and that of a successful career woman. →



MYSTERIOUS, SEXY, COOL
"I have to have the lights off when I'm in the studio—I don't mind seeing you, but you can't see me."

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT PAUL MAXWELL

She settles down to talk, quietly sipping a Snapple iced tea, absorbing the café's frantic energy. Her thoughtful brown eyes fix on a boy, age six or seven, who is running through the café and ends up falling on his face near our table. While teens Aaliyah's age continue to sit nearby, stifling giggles, she gets up to hand the boy the shoe he lost in his stumble. "Are you okay?" Aaliyah asks. "Yeah," he says, unruffled. "Thanks." She returns to her seat without fanfare, seeming somehow older and wiser than her years.

Aaliyah (which means "most exalted one" in Arabic) was born in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn and moved to Detroit at age five. When she was seven, she was pursuing roles in school plays and singing wherever an audience presented itself. At nine, her uncle (Jomo's father) began managing her career. In between auditions for TV pilots, Aaliyah was, she says, "very athletic," taking up swimming, roller skating, and basketball at different times.

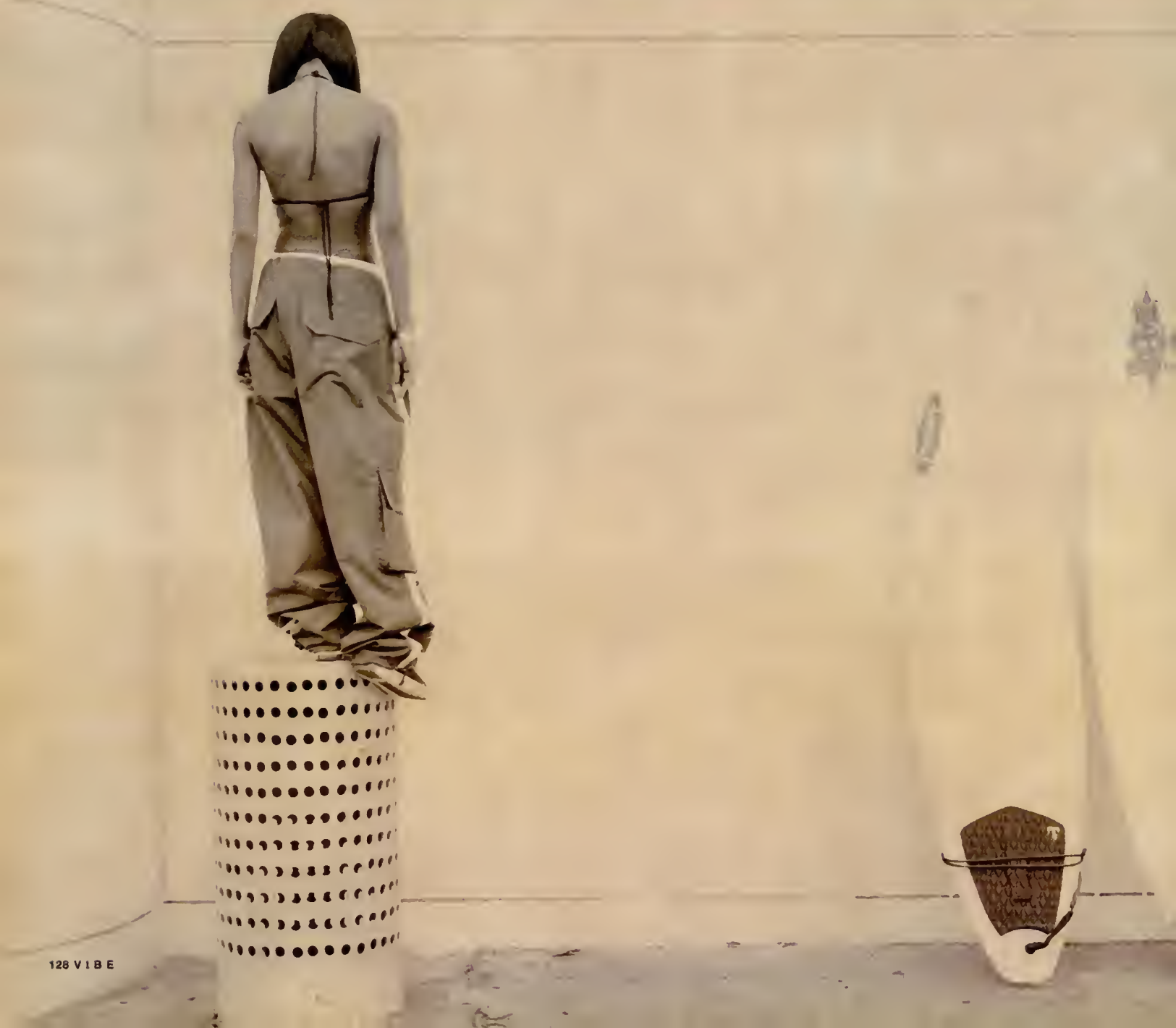
Far from the stereotypical situation of stage parents forcing their children into showbiz, it was Aaliyah who turned the tables. "I pushed *them*," she says, laughing. "I would talk to my mom every day. After school I'd go to her job and be, like, Ma, did anybody call me? Anybody call about signing me? I was into it. For real."

At age 11, after a performance on *Star Search*, the senior Hankerson—who was previously married to Gladys Knight—secured a five-night engagement for Aaliyah with Knight in Las Vegas. Aaliyah performed a number in the middle of Knight's set; then helped her close out the show with a duet of "Believe in Yourself." "It was a great learning experience," she says coolly, finishing off her iced tea. "I learned a lot about being onstage and how audiences react differently to various songs."

But despite her cultivated bashful image, Aaliyah has always been a performer. "I would sing at the drop of a hat," she recalls. "Anytime anybody asked me—I was singing Marvin Gaye, Johnny Mathis, and Isley Brothers songs for my friends in school, after school, and whenever company came over." Her mother, Diane, played these artists in her home, unwittingly educating her daughter in the classics. Those influences are apparent on *One in a Million*: Aaliyah puts a new-fangled, feminine spin on the Isleys' "Choosey Lover," while her cover of Gaye's "Got to Give It Up" magically preserves the soul-enriched integrity of the original.

Jaundiced listeners will search to find Aaliyah's hidden messages to R. Kelly throughout *One in a Million*. But despite the ever churning rumor mills, Aaliyah has moved on past troubled waters. These days she's looking ahead to augmenting her show for a tour that will include a larger band and dancers.

"I just think this is the next level for me. I'm 17 now, so I've grown in a lot of ways—artistically, vocally, and the whole bit," she says, pondering her future. "I'm very creative and always thinking of what I can do next, like songwriting, dancing, and acting," she says. "I'm having fun and enjoying the fruits of my labor." ◘




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DRAGONS
Eyavro, Drago, Crazy Horse, Silent.
"We ain't no wannabes."

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RESERVATION DOGS

On the Navajo reservation in northeast Arizona, the elders say the earth must be filled with bones and bullets. Why else would their children be arming themselves, wearing gang colors, and killing one another? *By Kathy Dobie. Photographs by Dana Lixenberg*

THE NAVAJO RESERVATION, ARIZONA; GANGBANGERS IN THE NATURAL WORLD

The moon's a cold lord staring down at the road, the leaping jackrabbits, the sagebrush, the red rock looming, without favor, without flinching. We fly, tires spinning, dark-eyed car, speakers slamming. Harmon at the wheel, his cousin Pop-Tart in the backseat. Once, we almost hit a rabbit. It shoots into our headlights, my breath's a scream, and the boys laugh. The country's old and strange, but it doesn't think so. It has seen Navajo warriors, Navajo captives of cavalry, sheep come, sheep go; after a while all jackrabbits look the same, and we pass in that procession now, two Navajo gangbangers and the white lady in a dark-eyed car. Harmon in his hairnet and baggies; Pop-Tart worrying he's been cursed. He'd like to move to the city where no one be witching you.

Rap is blasting from the speakers, making the car thump like a big heart. It could be blaring out of any car anywhere—Chicago, Phoenix, East L.A. Canyons? Jackrabbits strong as deer? History? "I'm not a thief / I'm the chief / One hundred percent beef / Like Rolaids, you come to me for relief." Harmon and his homeboys are in a rap group called Tribal Live; record producers tell them they don't sound Indian enough. We shoot down the empty road, speakers pulsing, "Bang, bang to the brains / It's another native tongue...."

WINDOW ROCK; THE GANG INVESTIGATOR AND SACRED DAMAGE

So, how does it feel to be a minority?" asks Officer Monica Begay, the gang investigator for the Navajo Tribal Police, who is small with a tough-guy grin. When she tells me no one will speak to me unless she's around, I believe her. The illogic of it—gangbangers won't talk unless there's a cop around?—beat down by her confidence. I meet her at Window Rock, the capital of the Navajo Nation. The reservation covers the entire northeast corner of Arizona, over 16 million acres of canyons and desert, with a cluster of towns—Window Rock, St. Michael's, Fort Defiance—to the east. One Indian song describes this land as "A House Made of Dawn. It was made of pollen and of rain."

The dashboard of Monica's police truck provides our horizon line. As she drives, she tells me there are more than a thousand reservation youths in gangs. The Cobras and the Dragons are the biggest ones. She says a Cobra moved here from Chicago in '90 and began ranking kids in.

"Dragons—we don't know their leaders. They're into tattoos and satanism. Even the cops are afraid of them. A lot of these kids are half Mexican or half white, so they're mixed up. We've got a number locked up in federal prisons now. Butterfly knife's the favorite weapon, alcohol's their drug. They break into houses for beer money. Fort Defiance is our worst area. Drug dealing, stabbings. I've got four ladies there who are my neighborhood watch. We're going to see one of them now—both her sons are Cobras. Her ride was vandalized last night."

And boom! There's a dirt road, rutted like the moon, and small brown government houses, and a white Sunbird sunk to the ground, tires slashed, windows smashed in.

A woman opens the door for us, tall with long brown hair and bangs and cheeks cherry red like they'd been scrubbed with sand. "I'm feeling ugly today," she says.

Shirley Yellowfeather tells Monica that her oldest son, Colbryn, is in the back room shaking so hard his teeth are chattering. "He goes, 'Mom, I'm scared. I don't want anything to happen to you.' " Shirley thinks he's suicidal. "I'm just trying to comfort my boy—he's not thinking right." She has a girlish voice—shiny, angled up—and a Navajo accent.

Monica disappears into the back room. Shirley's husband, Bryan, stands off in the kitchen, saying nothing. On the wall, a large brownish painting of Jesus, two red candles at its side. Did her car get attacked because her sons are Cobras or because she's in the neighborhood watch? Shirley doesn't know. "They beat up my husband one time," she says. Cobras did? "They were my son's friends." When I turn and ask him why, he says, "I don't know." Then adds shyly, "I was coming back drunk."

Shirley's got six kids, five of them living with her in the Rio Puerco housing units, which are pretty much Cobra territory. Her 16-year-old boy Delmar joined the Cobras first. Colbryn, who's 18, joined to protect Delmar. Shirley describes them as opposites—Delmar, very smart and unreachable; Colbryn, thoughtful, open; "He can still hug you." In January Shirley found a handgun in Delmar's room and had him locked up in juvenile detention.

Shirley went to a medicine woman to get help for Colbryn. The woman saw a vision of three boys in a hogan (the traditional Navajo home with the doorway facing east) dressed in black, wearing hoods. "She saw my son in there too. He's all dressed in white, but there's a knife right in his face," Shirley says. The medicine woman told Shirley to get Colbryn out of here right away.

Colbryn's tall, lanky and handsome, with fire-red eyes. He sits on some pillows on the floor, clutching his stomach, staring gloomily into the carpet like he sees a ghost there. Monica begins talking to him in a low voice, "Right now, things are falling in on you guys. Who's getting it now? It's mom now. Somebody's gonna get hurt soon...." Her voice is gentle, restless as rain. "I'm kind of planting a seed in your brain," Monica says. Then he's released. From the back, he calls, "Ma, you got any aspirin?"

Monica laughs when I say I'll drive around at night to see if I can find gang members. "They'll find you," she says, and tells me to avoid the Dragons altogether. "No matter what, don't approach them when they're in a group."

Phil Bluehouse is supposed to put the gangs in some kind of Navajo context. He works for the Peacemaker Division of the Navajo Judicial Branch. When Monica and I walk in, there's a young guy sitting at a desk wearing a hairnet. He introduces himself as Harmon and tells me he's doing research on reservation gangs. I tell him what I'm doing, and he says cool,

he belongs to a gang in Phoenix. Then Phil takes me into his office, leaving the gangbanger researcher and the gang investigator cop outside.

Phil uses the phrase "sacred damage" to explain their violent youth—white America's relentless attack on Navajo culture and spirituality. He says his generation (he's 46) rejected the white man's culture and embraced traditional ways. It's a self-conscious traditionalism and one they haven't successfully passed on to their children.

"I HAVE A CAR, A GANG OF GOLD, AND PEOPLE GET JEALOUS. WHAT DO THEY DO? THEY WITCH YOU."

Phil tells me a story. He was counseling a family; the oldest son was a gangbanger and surly during the session. Phil asked him, "What if I was a small, scraggly looking dog crawling out of the bushes, hungry, looking up at you with big eyes?"

"I'd kill you," the boy said.

"Okay, what if I was a collie, all brushed, clean, nice haircut…"

"I don't know. Maybe take you home."

"A Navajo dog?"

"Kill you."

Outside the office, Harmon smiles but he seems subdued. He's smooth-skinned, heavy-jawed, not tall but wide. Tells me he's a graduate of the University of New Mexico. Was born and raised here in Window Rock but spent a lot of his high school years in Phoenix, hooking up with a gang there. "I'm not active now," he says, "but, straight-up, if I have to represent, I will."

Harmon thinks the reservation gangs aren't as hardcore as city gangs. "They tag everywhere," he says, "like they want to take over the whole reservation." But then they don't defend the turf that's obviously theirs "unless they have a whole gang of homies." Is that the mark of a reservation gangster: great ambition but no self-confidence?

The next day I go to see Harmon alone. I tell him Phil's raggedy dog story. "That's fucked up," he says. Harmon's Navajo, Apache, Mexican, and "straight-up down for the Brown," but he doesn't think his homeboys have that self-consciousness. "They're just straight-up gangster," he says. "You ask them how they feel about being Navajo and they'll just kind of laugh it off, like, 'Oh, Navajo, oh, all right, whatever.' "

When some researcher from Temple University told Harmon that the reservation crime rates were lower than the national averages, Harmon told him that that was because nobody was gonna jack a car on the res—you'd be caught right away. You go to Gallup or Phoenix, any big city nearby. "He was making us look soft and shit. Fuck that, man! I know homeboys that will just shoot somebody point-blank without giving a fuck. I have homeboys like that, and I'm sure the Cobras do—the Dragons do."

People keep telling Harmon he's gonna have to make a choice—the straight life or his homies. He wants the good life, but he says, "Everything I do, I have to include my homeboys." Since he's returned home from college, Harmon sometimes finds himself thinking about suicide. "A lot of people don't know that. They think, 'Oh, Harmon, Mister He Has Everything Made For Him.' " College was good for him; in college everything was clear. Back here, he begins to think about everything he wants to do, and begins to worry he won't.

RIO PUERCO; THE MOTHERS

On a Sunday afternoon, Sharon and Nora, the neighborhood watch ladies, have arrived at Shirley's house. "I wish you could meet some of these *real* Navajos," Shirley says. "We should take her around somewhere, take her to some real Navajos, have her see a hogan."

Sometimes, Nora brings her kids to her parents' hogan in the hills. "It's like freeing a bird," Nora says. When great-grandma eats, the kids crowd around to watch; it makes the adults laugh. They touch her hair, tied up in a Navajo bun, trace the hand stitching on her skirt. The women tell me these things to show that their children have a fascination with the old ways, a crack in their tough young hearts.

Sharon's kids and Nora's nephews are involved with Westside RSC (Rollin' Sixty Crips), a Gallup gang that's allied with the reservation Dragons. The Cobras are their enemies. "We hang with a different set," Nora says, and the ladies break out laughing. The women have been threatened, their husbands beaten up. The grandson of the fourth lady in the neighborhood watch was stabbed to death by Cobras. Some of the elders believe that the cause of all this violence lies buried in the ground at Fort Defiance. Shirley explains their theory to me, sounding excited at first, then tired.

Fort Defiance was the first U.S. military outpost established in Navajo Country. In 1863 the army began rounding up the Navajos, killing those who wouldn't surrender. Within a year, 8,500 Navajos were imprisoned at Fort Defiance. They were marched 300 miles to a reservation in New Mexico where a quarter of the tribe died. Four years later they were allowed to return to their homelands. The elders say the earth here must be filled with bones and bullets; the houses of Rio Puerco built on top like tombstones. The only way to cure this new gang violence is to dig up all traces of the old violence and have a medicine person bless the earth. It sounds right to Shirley, and it sounds impossible.

Shirley knows what the older people think, because Shirley speaks Navajo. "I was raised by a squaw and a Navajo medicine man," she says. Sometimes her sons tease Shirley about her English; "Aw, ma, you're a real Navajo!" She was astonished, "What do you think you are?"

"I see the way our kids are today, and they don't have respect for nothing," says Nora. "They try to act more like the black culture, the Spanish culture."

"Even the way they dress," Shirley agrees. They ask their kids why are you acting like those rappers on MTV, why the strut? Navajos are supposed to be humble, loving. Why is your hair like Snoop? "Even the Navajo girls, they have beads and extensions now," Nora says. "Suddenly, they're trying to look like Janet Jackson."

Older Navajos still identify themselves by their clan names, Shirley says, but in this younger generation, "cousins are fighting cousins." Within her own clan, the Water Edge people, there are Cobras and Dragons hating each other. It breaks Shirley's heart: "People always say that we need to come back to our culture. I believe it's gonna happen, but only with the little ones. Not these guys."

When Shirley thinks of her culture, she sees a hogan and her mother hanging onto the door for dear life. "When I was three, my mom was taken away by a policeman. She was beaten up because they said she was mentally ill and she didn't want to leave me. I never saw her for six years, and then when I saw her, she freaked me out. She was sitting in a cage. And her hair was bald, and her teeth was all taken out. And after that they took me away."

"For 17 years of my life, I drank and I drank, and I got married three times too. I can understand why my boys are the way they are—it's because of me." Shirley sighs. "We're supposed to be connected to the ground, to Mother Earth. When I first sobered up, that's how I was. Oh, I just missed the hogan! I wanted to go up into the mountains and be in a quiet place. I used to cry a lot because a lot of feelings were new.

"The way we were raised is beautiful. A lot of your feelings come back. The talking circles, they really help you come back down to the ground. Our kids don't know these things, the real cultural way. It would be so neat putting them back to the way they were."

THE TOHATCHI JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER, NEW MEXICO; COBRA BROTHERS

At the Tohatchi Juvenile Detehtion Center, Delmar and three other Cobras in orange jumpsuits tell me they own Window Rock; hell, they own the reservation. "Whoever steps up to us…" one Cobra begins, "steps down," the others finish, laughing. There's no counseling, no rehab, and one TV at this lockup. The four seem amazed that anyone's come here, that they're out of their cells.

A Cobra called Joker says he hasn't seen his parents in a while, and if he does see his father, he'll jump him, take his money; shit, he'll take his car. Says all this with smiling enthusiasm. They used to be scared of their fathers. Now, they'd just kill them.

The Cobras tell me many of their relatives are traditional. They are not, of course. "I'm not traditional, but I'm a Native American. It's all in here," says a deadserious Cobra, tapping his chest. His voice is pained. "It's just, time changes. Everything changes." Joker says, "I wish I knew Navajo, and I wish I was like, uh, traditional, but they didn't teach me, so…."

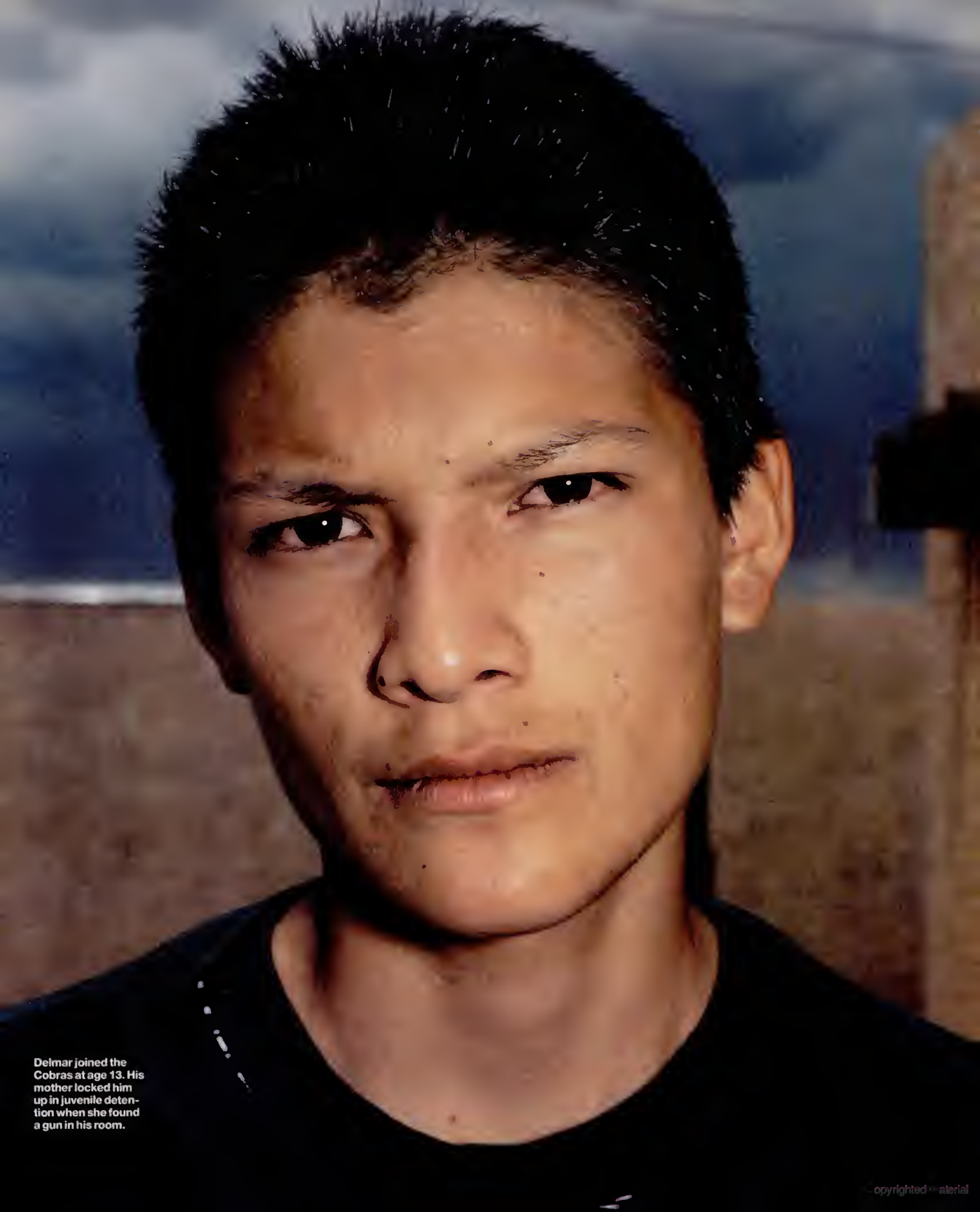
Their faces burn with frustration and, deeper than that, humiliation. Their younger siblings will speak Navajo, since it's just being introduced in the schools. I wonder if these boys know they're the ones who've been written off.

Before I leave, Delmar gives me a message for his older brother.

When I see Colbryn at his girlfriend's house, we talk about Delmar. When he was real small, Delmar was Shirley's guardian. "He took care of my little sisters too," Colbryn says. "I just took off with my friends 'cause I was scared, too scared—of my stepfather and mother, of their being drunk, afraid I was gonna get hit." Too scared—that's Colbryn's judgment on himself. When Delmar was jumped by two grown men recently, Colbryn, the reflective brother, took a bat and put both men in the hospital.

I tell him I saw Delmar. "He said to tell you to get out, go to Job Corps." Colbryn's face opens like a window, pure wonder and pleasure. The brothers hardly talk to each other.

"I'm going back to see him—do you want me to tell him anything?" I ask. We're standing at the front door, where one lone tree seems to have snagged all the birds in the neighborhood. Colbryn looks off in the distance for a long time. "Tell him when I got his message, it made me glad." He smiles softly to himself. →



Delmar joined the Cobras at age 13. His mother locked him up in juvenile detention when she found a gun in his room.

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Some of Sharon's kids are involved with the Westside Crips. She joined the neighborhood watch when her husband was beat up by Cobras.

RESERVATION ROAD; HARMON AND POP-TART

Harmon and I drive through a thin rain to get to his cousin Pop-Tart's house. We arrive at a suburban-looking neighborhood that has one of the highest crime rates on the reservation but no gangs. "I grew up here," Pop-Tart says. "The first year I was born, my mom was seeing this one Hopi guy, and, um, my dad kind of got pissed off, and he killed that guy over here by my grandparents' home. After that, he showed everybody around here what he could do—he was dragging that body all over the place."

Pop-Tart's small, clean-cut. He's got a ready laugh, watchful eyes. He seems easy to hang with, like he'd enjoy anything that came along: a good meal, a car accident.

Pop-Tart belongs to the same Phoenix gang as Harmon, and to another one in Albuquerque. He's 22 and can't find work. "Right now, I'm just waiting. I don't know what for. But I want to do something with my life, man."

"This homeboy's straight-up loco," Harmon says, and they both laugh. Harmon says Pop-Tart's the only homeboy he can count on. The word they use for what they do for each other is "sacrifice." Your last three bucks, your life. I ask if it's because they're blood.

"It's 'cause we're both fucking crazy," Harmon says roughly and laughs. And it's like somebody pulled a switch—the air is shot with electricity. Harmon takes over the interview. He tells me that if he was gonna start a gang here—and he's not, because he's on the down-low—this is how he'd rank them in: "I'm gonna do it straight-up OG-style. I'm gonna build a 10-x-10 pit. I'm gonna fill it with glass. I'm gonna make the motherfuckers walk in it barefooted, and I'm gonna beat on their ass. The second part of it is, I'm gonna brand their asses. Fuck the tattoos. I'm gonna see if these motherfuckers are straight down. And when I know they passed the test, I'm gonna make sure they're fucking armed. Fuck the knife shit. Fuck the bat shit. Fuck this board with nails and shit like that. Fuck the chain with a couple of padlocks at the end. I'm gonna make sure they have fucking firepower."

His soliloquy ends with Pop-Tart's and my laughter, not because he's saying anything funny but because he's free, he's on a rampage; it's exhilarating. "You want to be some kind of kingpin?" I ask. "Straight-up cartel," he says. "The way I look at it? I want to conquer this world." People keep telling him the choice is between success and his homies, the good life and the gang, but it's obvious that those things have always been one and the same for Harmon. Thug life has been the vehicle for his ambition, an ambition no one seems to have taken into account.

"They think you should grow up the same way they did, like with traditional values and customs but, hey, look, this is almost 2000, straight-up. You gotta do what you gotta do. Whether it's jacking a car, jacking gas, ripping off this, ripping off that."

At his graduation dinner, with all of his family at the table, Harmon gave a speech. "I told them straight-up, I'm in a gang, and I always represent for my 'hood. I said I'm living proof of what people don't want to see." And what is that, I want to know.

"Check it out," Harmon replies. "Motherfuckers is always waiting for someone good like me to slip. I have a car, a gang of gold. I work hard to get shit like that. When somebody sees that, they get jealous. So what do they do? In the traditional way? They witch you. They put curses on you, straight-up. And I always ask my mom, What the fuck's wrong with me? I'm slipping. So she takes me to a medicine person; the medicine person says, 'Oh, somebody done witch your ass.' "

Both Pop-Tart and Harmon think they might have curses on them now. Harmon hasn't been paid for his gang research, and he's been laid off until the funding arrives. He was always told to go to college and come back to work for his people. "They say oh, we need young minds to come in and do the work and fresh ideas and shit. Well, look at this mind, it's going to waste....It's hard. Eating once a day. It's hard, man. And look—" he hits his chest, "college graduate motherfucker." Now he laughs, but his laugh seems embarrassed, pained.

"They're straight stuck on this culture tradition shit," Harmon says, his Tribal Live tape playing in the background. "In one of my raps, I talk about the land, about how we don't have no jobs, but yet they say the land is our only resource and all this other crap. You know what I think? There should be a big city, maybe two or three, a little bit bigger than Gallup on the reservation. Why can't we have that? Because if we put in a Wal-Mart, a Shop 'n Save, Gallup would lose *all* their business. We'd be pulling in a gang of money! But they don't even..." He sucks his tongue in disgust. "It's, like, useless, man."

Living proof of what they don't want to see. A successful gangster? A worldly Navajo? "I figure there's a much better life out there than here," Harmon says.

ST. MICHAEL'S; THE DRAGONS

Everybody who's supposed to introduce me to a Dragon falls through. I wake one morning in despair of ever meeting them. I'm actually on my knees praying for Dragons when it occurs to me—Shirley grew up in St. Michael's, now Dragon turf. In fact, one night the ladies and I had driven over there so Shirley could show me her cousin's house all shot up in Cobra drive-bys. But Nora was driving and didn't even want to stop the car. She'd seen the Dragons come pouring out of a trailer once, dozens of them "like spiders," and she was scared. The shot-up house, standing dark and pitted under the moon, seemed like something I'd dreamed about.

When Shirley told her husband what I wanted her to do, he said, "That lady comes from far away. She doesn't know anyone. Try and help her."

The dirt road humps and sways to a cluster of houses.

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Shirley's cousin doesn't have electricity; it would only make for a better target. She's left the bullet holes because she has no faith that there won't be more. She comes out to us, a stocky woman with a shrewd, humorous look on her face. She and Shirley speak in Navajo, and a young man is called over. I ask for an interview, and he says awkwardly, "I don't do that kind of thing."

"Okay," I say, and he waits–like I have him on a rope. But I'm in the nest of spiders. "It's really okay," I say happily, and he steps back, relieved. "Maybe my sister can talk to you." And a girl appears thumping a baseball into a mitt, brown eyes lively and hard. "You're so pretty!" Shirley says.

Straight off, the girl says that the Dragons don't call themselves a gang; they're family. "Everyone's related," she says. "We don't allow people in unless they're clan." She says they're smaller than the Cobras, but it don't matter because the Cobras are all little kids. The Dragons haven't ranked anyone in for a long time–don't need to. And they wouldn't be jumping anyone's parents. "We give our respect to the elders." After a while her brother says, "You can ask me any question you want. I'll try to answer it."

He's got a *D* tattooed on his arm; she wears a blue Mother Mary medallion on a chain. They tell me their names are Drago and Eyavro. Another Dragon appears who gives his name as Crazy Horse. He's got a muffled voice, an army jacket.

No one is gangstered-out: no baggies, no colors. "We ain't no wannabes," Eyavro says contemptuously. "We're on our own." Sometimes they wear Calvin Klein for the initials–Cobra Killer–but clothes don't matter to them. They know enough Navajo to joke with each other in the language. I hear "dineh" used for the first time–meaning "the people," as Navajos refer to themselves.

The Cobra drive-bys usually happen around three or four in the morning. The Dragons keep watch, sitting out here in heavy coats, facing the road below. "If we allow them to come here and push people around, it would be just as bad as Rio Puerco," Drago says. "That's why we shoot back. There was no choice but to take it in your own hands."

I ask him how the people in St. Michael's feel about them, expecting to hear that grateful elders are bringing them hot food and cigarettes during their long watches. "I don't know how these people think about us," he says. "We're not angels, but we're trying to keep our family safe. They killed our cousin, we found him in a ditch stabbed and shot and bruises all over his body."

Three Dragons have died in the last year, but when I ask them if they worry about getting killed, Drago says quietly, "No, for me it would be suicide. I'd probably walk down to Rio Puerco, let them do what they want to do, get their kicks out of me. I got no fear toward them." He tells me there's a Navajo phrase meaning "the warrior walks to his enemy," and that's how the Dragons are.

The day becomes dusky; birds zing about. Strange whistles pierce the air, from hill to house, and more Dragons appear. "It's not fun when the Cobras don't bother us 'cause we have nothing to do," Drago says. They can't find work on the reservation. "Lately I'm just going downhill. See, that's why I leave sometimes, because I want to get something for myself. But then I mess up. It seems everywhere I go, I run into prejudice." Dragons lean against the wall of the house, passing a forty, seven of them now. The moon lights the road below and the shrubs where they say the FBI sometimes sets up surveillance. Shadows trail from their faces, tossed off by laughter–"Dragons don't freeload, they reload"–by lips lifted to the bottle. Drago says, "I dreamed this would happen." Dreamed that they were all standing here, talking to a stranger.

When Shirley and I go to leave, Drago asks if I think gangs are stupid and waits hard for my reply.

I remember Harmon's homeboys with their "straight-up gangster" identity, reservation boys allying themselves with Phoenix and Chicago, Compton and the Bronx. Paying tribute to the world, an admiring overture. Gang colors as the perfect traveling clothes. People always complaining to Harmon–why don't you rap in Navajo? But it's almost 2000, and the Indian's wearing gang colors like the Invisible Man wore bandages–See me now? A question asked with hope, love, and rage. Hey, L.A.! Whassup, Chicago! See me now, motherfucker? But I don't say any of this to Drago. I just tell him people create whatever they need.

One night, Drago was keeping watch alone, and suddenly there was a truckload of Cobras, right there. He'd been thinking about things and they'd rolled right up on him, and he thought, "So this is it," stood up and waited. They looked at him and looked at him and rolled away.

He's alone a lot now. Just sits up there at the house by himself. He doesn't think about it being dangerous, just thinks this is a quiet place where you can walk all around without getting hurt, because it pleases him to think that.

He's been to Albuquerque, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, and Montana. "That's about it. I haven't gone further.



I would like to but…." Where? "Somewhere where there's forests. I guess that sounds stupid." He'd like to hole up in a cabin by himself. "I probably sound like I've given up. I guess I have. It's not that I'm scared. I'm tired of running. Let them take me."

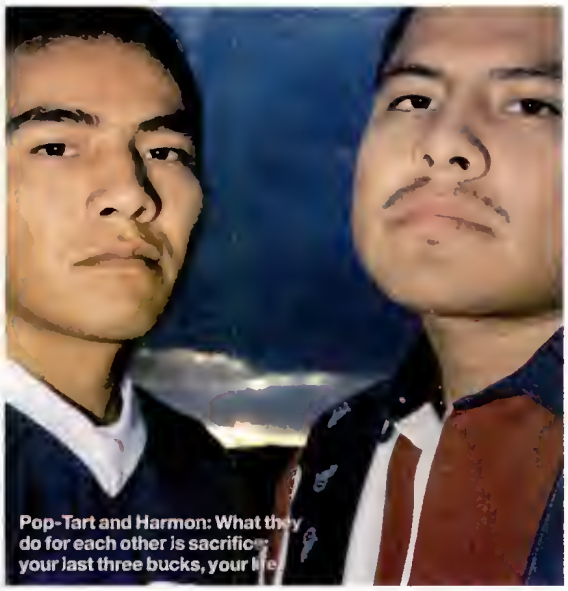
"My cousin, he hated me. I don't know what I done to him but I know he did." On the night his cousin died, they got drunk. His cousin said, 'Hey, let's go to a party'. "We were the only two walking on the road, and he said, 'Drago, you have nothing to prove to me no more. I know you're down. Now get out of here. This place is fucked. Go and finish school.' "

Then his cousin switched into high gear, shouted, "Tonight's the night!" walked ahead of Drago, peed in the bushes, still shouting. Drago thought his cousin meant tonight was the night he was gonna shoot somebody. "It's what he liked doing–shooting people. He shot at a cop, he shot at so many people. That was one of his tickets out. He gets sent off to prison, serves time." Drago tried to talk his cousin out of it with "fuck those pussies, leave 'em alone"–just something to get his mind off shooting at somebody.

Their friends picked them up in two cars. Drago got into the first one, his cousin in the second. Down the road they went. "I just heard a shot. He was with three other guys. He just pointed it at his head and pulled the trigger."

He thinks about what his cousin said all the time. Still can't understand what he meant by "this place is fucked." He turns it over in his head, trying to start up a conversation with a dead man. His cousin said this place will kill you and then killed himself, said "leave" and then left. Is leaving life or death? "I still don't know what he meant. I guess I never will."

He thinks the other Dragons are getting tired of him. "I don't talk much anymore. They probably think I'm boring. I'll still throw down with the C's, but, I don't know, I just don't care." He's been told the future is the past, if he's told anything about the future at all. Back, back, back to Paradise. But he wanted something for himself, he said, and went into the world.



Pop-Tart and Harmon: What they do for each other is sacrifice your last three bucks, your life.

Who would dare say he's not a real Navajo, not a real gangbanger? That he has no past and no future? He has his own memories, after all; at one time, he had visions. "Do you think the dead stick around, to get their revenge, to protect the people they love?" I ask. "Yeah. That's what they say. I don't know. I don't know what I believe anymore."

Is this what Indians eat?" A white woman sitting at the Navajo Nation Inn holds up a wad of fried bread, and asks the waitress…

Harmon, Pop-Tart, and I are at the next table. "I'm Indian," Harmon mutters darkly. "And I'm eating a fucking burrito."

We fly, tires spinning, dark-eyed car, speakers slamming. Harmon at the wheel, Pop-Tart in the backseat. Once we almost hit a rabbit. It shoots into our headlights, my breath's a scream and the boys laugh.

Rap blasts out of the speakers, "I'm not a thief / I'm the chief / one hundred percent beef…." It could be blasting out of any car anywhere–Chicago, Phoenix, East L.A. The country's old and strange but so the fuck what? The young Navajos speed over the land in a dark-eyed car, scattering jackrabbits, speakers pulsing, "bang bang to the brain, it's another native tongue." As cold as history, as tough and unsentimental.

Up ahead, a car's tilted off the road and a man in a wide-sleeve shirt waves his arms. No way Harmon and Pop-Tart are stoppin' for that. Somebody they know picked up a hitchhiker on these roads; he turned out to be a guy who everyone knew had been dead for years. They shoot right past him, churning clouds–dust to the dusty–and barrel on to the freeway, living, breathing, *HUNGRY* Indians. *What do Indians eat?* They eat fucking burritos.





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UCCI

Legends on the



Claude "Fiddler" Williams
Blue plaid wool suit and white button-down shirt, both by Nicole Farhi; vintage tie by D.L. Cerney



Sam Johnson
Gray suit with red pinstripe, white shirt, and striped tie, all by Yohji Yamamoto



Ahmad Alaadeen
Gray suit by Yohji Yamamoto



VIBE

With sharp suits and striking silhouettes, Kansas City jazz legends return home to historic 18th and Vine—ground zero of '30s jazz.
Photographs by William Claxton. Styling by Derick Procope



Sonny Kenner
Black tuxedo and white button-down shirt, both by cK by Calvin Klein; black vintage bow tie by D.L. Cerney

Black suit, striped tie, and white cotton button-down shirt, all by Yohji Yamamoto; hat by Paul Smith

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Navy blue single-breasted suit and white button-down shirt, both by Yohji Yamamoto; black vintage tie by D.L. Cerney



Bobby Watson Sr. Burgundy single-breasted suit and fuchsia button-down shirt, both by Ozwald Boateng; bow tie by Paul Smith Accessories



Black V-neck sweater and black-and-white-stripe sweater, both by agnés b.; black and brown hats, both by Makins Hats



Special thanks to the Missouri Division of Tourism, Marnyce McKell of McKell and Associates PR firm, Roger Naber at the Grand Emporium blues club, the cast of the MC Players, and the Black Economic Union.


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Holiday Gift Guide

When looking for that perfect present this season, think of something luxurious, something useful, or something inspiring. Here are a few ideas to spark your Christmas spirit.



1


2



3


4


5


6



7

1. Bijan Light for Men
Pleasure for the senses from the same fragrance makers who are currently creating a cologne for Michael Jordan.

2. Iman cosmetics
A special holiday gift box featuring lipsticks, nail polishes, blush (with a separate brush), moisturizer, and cleansing lotion, for the woman who has everything—except the latest makeup colors.

3. D&G Music
Not a compilation of Foxy Brown shoutouts, but a jammin' dance music disc in the spirit of the Italian fashion design duo, Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana.

4. Respect Lap Pak
A chic backpack for laptop computers, complete with zip-off straps, briefcase grip, cell-phone case, pager clip, removable wrist pad, and storage areas for diskettes, files, or whatever. (To order, call 415-512-8995.)

5. Playboy cigar
Only original player Hugh Hefner could market the ultimate mack accessory for the '90s.

6. Ghetto Cookies
Lip-smackin' cookies made from scratch from the combined family recipes of founders Ralph Rolle and Marisol Figueroa. (To order, call 800-211-7060.)

7. Haze sweatshirt
Graffiti artist turned clothing designer Eric Haze creates these West Coast threads with old-school, East Coast style.



Marc Echō

Echō might be his name, but his artistic voice follows no one. As the designer and founder of Echō Unlimited, Marc Echō stays close to the streets; as a businessman, he knows the promotion techniques needed to stay afloat (all his T-shirts come with a mix tape of unsigned MCs). His clothing line is one of the freshest flavors yet to hit the urban stomping grounds. Although his clothes have been around for four years, heads have only recently started recognizing the unique and authentic street motifs of his T-shirts, hoodies, hats, bags, and accessories. And if that's not enough, the mad graffiti bomber is going to have a creative hand in the costuming of *Jurassic Park 2*. Echō attributes his new popularity to his ability to appeal to everyone. "The only way to succeed [in this business] is to be labeled as an American designer instead of a young men's designer," he says.

Echō started out as a graffiti artist in Lakewood, N.J. While a pharmacology major at Rutgers University, he decided to put his artwork on T-shirts. After that, he graduated to sweatshirts, baseball caps, and just about everything else he could imagine. Now living in Edison, N.J., Echō runs his company along with his twin sister, Marci, Seth Gerszberg, and Serch (formerly of 3rd Bass), who handles all of Echō's street promotion. "I plan on doing this for the rest of my life," says Echō. If his track record is any indication, that won't be a problem. *The Blackspot*



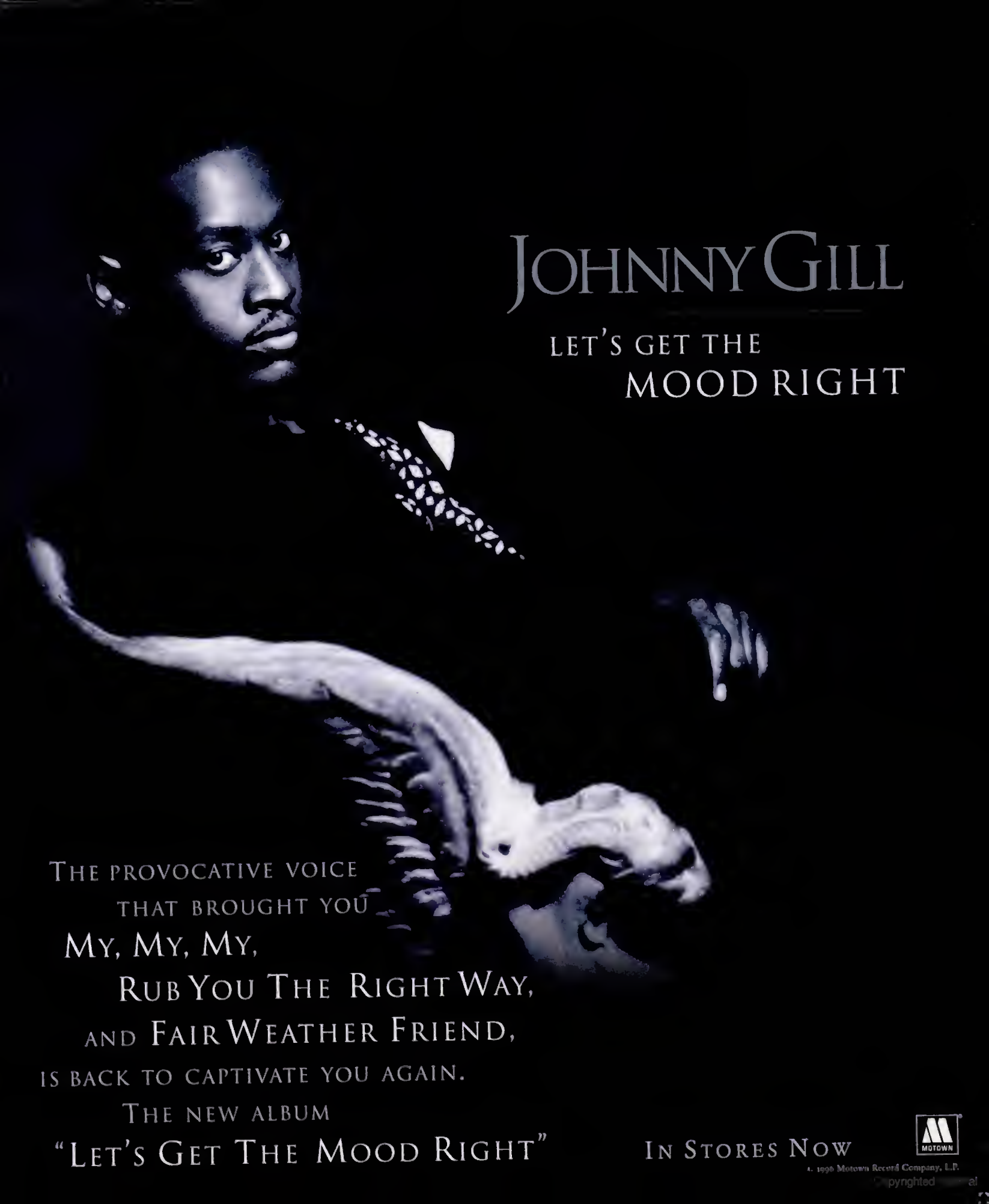
MVP Sports Point Forward; Magic's Elixir (below)

JAYSON KEELING

Magic Inc.



Since retiring from the NBA after testing positive for HIV in 1991 (and again after his mini-comeback last season), Earvin "Magic" Johnson has plunged into assorted entrepreneurial projects: He owns two movie theaters, runs the Magic Johnson All-Stars (an international touring basketball team), and recently opened a shopping center in Las Vegas through his development corporation. His latest endeavors are MVP Sports, which produces a line of athletic shoes (including the Point Forward basketball shoe, which he wore last season), and Magic's Elixir, a bath soak for sore muscles. All proceeds from the soak, developed by Magic, his wife, Cookie, and Kiehl's, the New York–based skin-care line, benefit the Magic Johnson Foundation, which provides funding for HIV/AIDS education, prevention, and care. "I'm a hands-on person in all my businesses," says Magic. "I have input on design, style, and advertising and marketing." Magic's proving his best moves aren't always on the court. *Andréa M. Duncan*



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settling the score

With his fourth film, *Rosewood*, John Singleton pries open an ugly episode in American history. *By Frank Cassell*

He's swinging now, *Yessuah*!!"

A bullish, chiseled black man struggles against a coarse noose slipped tightly around his neck by a mob of drunk, sweaty white males. His legs twitch, and his torso sashays in the wind like a commencement-cap tassel dangling from a car's rearview mirror. The men below, holding torches and shotguns, react like fans at a sporting event.

"YEEEEEE-HAAAAAW!!!" one voice whoops with unabashed glee. "That's right, you gonna die now, boy!"

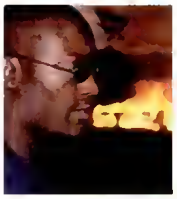
Inside a shadowy Warner Bros. postproduction recording studio in Burbank, Calif., five casually dressed white men are looking at footage from John Singleton's latest movie, *Rosewood*. Called a loop group, their specialty is to add voices to large ensemble scenes of a finished film, enhancing the images with a sonic and, in this case, chilling ambience.

"He 'bout dead," says a sandy-haired older man with the gentle face of a small-town dentist. "That nigger's gonna die, that's for sure."

On the opposite side of the isolation booth, Singleton—who's known for his outspoken stances against racism—responds under his →

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movies



***Rosewood*, continued**

breath, "Good stuff, good stuff." Pushing a button, his excited, rapid voice suddenly fills the other side of the isolation booth, snapping the men out of their Ku Klux craze.

"When the camera pushes in on his face, I need someone to say, 'That's a strong buck there,' " says Singleton. "Then someone else has to say, 'His neck ain't that thick.' You hear me?"

"I'll do it," says a lean, athletic man in a pink Izod. He adds the lines to the footage but ends up sounding like Dick Vitale at a Georgetown Hoyas game. Too much brio.

"Don't be so animated," Singleton admonishes. "Remember, these guys are supposed to sound tired. They've been chasing down and hanging people all night long."

Based on true events, *Rosewood* recreates a 1923 incident in which a mob of white workers burned down the once prosperous black town of Rosewood, Fla., lynching dozens of people after a local white woman alleged she was beaten by a black man.

Buried for 59 years, the incident was uncovered in 1982 by a *St. Petersburg Times* reporter, whose story sparked a lawsuit and eventually helped the survivors' descendants win a $2.1 million settlement from the Florida state legislature in 1994. At the film's core is the tale of two men, one black (Ving Rhames), the other white (Jon Voight), who fought off the mob and staged a daring rescue that saved many lives.

"*Rosewood* is really my first mature picture," Singleton says. A lanky presence with a bald head and intense, smiling eyes, he's wearing a black T-shirt with a motto that summarizes his worldview: SHOOT FILMS, NOT PEOPLE. "This is the first film I've made where people aren't worried about their parents or who they are as individuals. [The other ones] were coming-of-age stories, and, at 28, I've come of age."

A graduate of USC film school, Singleton first gained national attention in 1991 with his riveting writing and directing debut, *Boyz N the Hood*. The movie won him an Academy Award nomination for Best Director at age 23, making him the youngest ever to be so honored. Singleton's subsequent films *Poetic Justice* and *Higher Learning* have received far less critical and commercial acclaim, prompting some to wonder if his days in the spotlight are numbered. Singleton—who is already in preproduction on a modern-day version of the 1971 blaxploitation classic *Shaft* for MGM—doesn't seem too worried.

"Pop culture builds you up as the next best thing, then tears you down," he reasons. "Should my feelings be hurt by the critics? They want me to cry about it? Fuck it. All you do is continue to make movies. My measure of success isn't the same as other directors'. My measure is to be able to do the types of movies that I want to do, unencumbered."

Sitting back down at the console, Singleton instructs the sound editor to cue up a critical scene. Rhames and Voight are escaping a posse by train. Voight looks on in horror as Rhames picks up a shotgun and blows away a man chasing them on horseback. "What are you doing?" Voight says. "This is a war, and we're in the trenches," replies Rhames coldly.

"*Rosewood*, if anything, is a wake-up call, a story that hasn't been told yet and should never be forgotten," says Singleton, his voice filled with purpose. "It feels good to be the one in control this time around. Better me than some white-boy director who's not gonna let the black characters fight back when they're being raped and lynched. I've got brothers in this movie doing stuff they've never done in the history of American cinema. It's a simple matter of taking the guns and pointing them in the opposite direction."

tougher than leather

bad-ass ving rhames finally gets his first starring role



Nobody who saw *Pulp Fiction* can forget that scene: The movie's Mr. Big, Marcellus Wallace, is raped by a couple of sadomasochistic freak-azoids. When help arrives, he rises up, shoots one of his rapists and declares: "*I'ma get medieval on ya ass.*"

It was a hell of a way to make a career, but what a career it's made. Up till then, Ving Rhames, 34, had been a moderately successful but little known working actor. Since, he's been all over the place: playing a computer-whiz special agent in *Mission: Impossible*, a bouncer in *Striptease*, and a Nigerian street hustler in the upcoming *Dangerous Ground*, with Ice Cube and Elizabeth Hurley. This month Rhames can be seen tackling his first lead role in John Singleton's *Rosewood*. He plays a World War I veteran named Mann who wanders through a small black town, falls in love with a schoolteacher, and finds himself doing battle with a gang of homicidal rednecks.

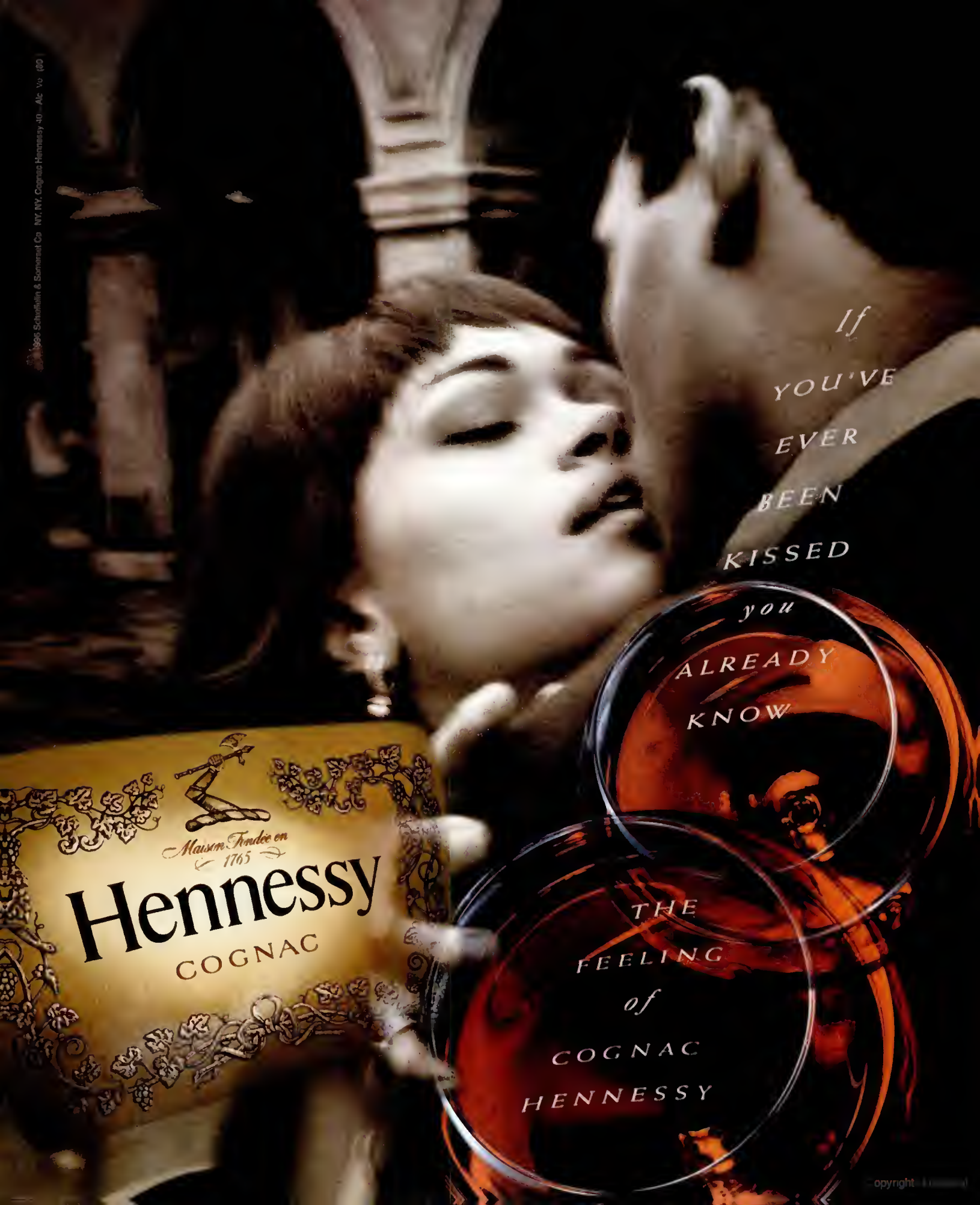
"There's something in this country about emasculating the black man," Rhames sighs. "When I was doing research on World War I vets for *Rosewood*, I found out that you could come home and people'd say, 'Oh, this nigga thinks he's uppity now, he slept with white women in France, he's got the uniform.' You could be lynched and castrated."

Rhames grew up in Harlem with "old-time hip hoppers" like DJ Hollywood, Lovebug Starski, and Kool Moe Dee. "I grew up poverty-stricken but I didn't know it," he says. "I had a whole lot of fun. Harlem was always filled with creative energy." His teachers encouraged him to audition for the High School of Performing Arts (of *Fame* fame). "It really opened up my vision of the world," he recalls. "It was the first time I was around white kids. Until then, everyone I knew was from the 'hood."

Though Rhames's hardcore, take-no-shit persona is the reason for much of his success, he recognizes that this very same persona may make it difficult for him to get big starring roles. In fact, he got the *Rosewood* lead only after Denzel Washington turned it down. "He's a little more palatable [to white audiences] than me from a physical standpoint," says Rhames. "When you got some big ol' shaven African-type nigga, you gonna have a problem."

A problem for others, maybe, but not for Rhames. "I'm a strong black man," he says. "No apologies."

Laura Jamison


If
YOU'VE
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ALREADY
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movies

dr. snakeskin's
HOME VIDEO VIEWS

In *Bugged*, giant, carnivorous crickets wreak havoc on a small town

Belching forth from the noxious, radiation-spewing cesspools of the fictional town of Tromaville, N.J. comes *Bugged*, Troma Productions' first black-cast horror entry since 1990's impressive *Def by Temptation*. Ronald K. Armstrong, the "auteur" of this direct-to-video release, tries to do the "scared niggas in a haunted house" routine one better: scared niggas terrorized by giant rubber crickets. Absurd, you say? An insult to the public's intelligence? Another of the Devil Whyteman's plans to separate you from the contents of your wallet? Of course, it is! For Troma, trash is just another marketing niche.



Director Armstrong and Priscilla Basque

COURTESY OF TROMA INC

An unfocused blend of sci-fi, horror, and comedy, *Bugged* begins with an involved prologue concerning a mad doc who develops a serum to "re-code the DNA ladder in order to produce more intelligent animals." When the FDA rejects his request to test his new serum on humans, brotherman tests it on himself and turns into a super-Stanley Crouch–type genius. Curiously, his comely young assistant thinks he's just drinking way too much coffee, until he putrefies into a puddle of vomit.

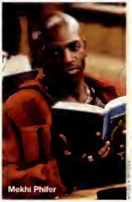
After the liquefied doc's research is discontinued, his serum is scheduled for disposal. But en route to the local chemical waste dump, an accident happens and canisters of the serum get mixed up with a new pesticide. A pair of bumbling exterminators end up using the DNA-altering substance to rid cutie-pie–poet Divine's (Priscilla Basque) home of cricket infestation. Naturally, the pesky critters mutate into Jiminy Cricket's carnivorous evil cousins, with IQs higher than, say, Cornel West, and a craving for human flesh.

Bugged has moments of creepiness. Unfortunately, they're sabotaged by humor cheaper than the cost of the film's bug-on-a-string special effects. If Roger Corman, MTV, and Hong Kong action movies taught us anything, it's that low-cost production values are best masked with snazzy, fast-paced editing, something Armstrong fails to employ in this poorly paced "horror-comedy."

Note: Contrary to the Janet Jackson–inspired publicity still, the film doesn't even offer a glimpse of a bare nipple. If this publication were Screw, *I'd rate* Bugged *one limp dick.*

high school high
TRISTAR

If *Naked Gun*, *Dangerous Minds*, and *Clockers* were fused together at the genetic level into one robust organism, the resulting life form would probably look like *High School High*. Written by David Zucker and Robert LoCash (*Airplane!*, the *Naked Gun* series, *CB4*), this movie transports their palette of sight gags, bathroom humor, and puns to fictional Marion



Mekhi Phifer

NICOLA GOODE

Barry High, an inner-city school "so tough that it has its own cemetery." Featuring the streety student Mekhi Phifer (*Clockers*), along with the self-effacing Jon Lovitz (*Saturday Night Live*) and succulent Tia Carrere (*Wayne's World*) as two highly idealistic teachers and logarithmically improbable lovers, *High* is stupid but fun—the entertainment equivalent of a package of Hostess Sno Balls.

Harry Allen

set it off
NEW LINE

Waiting to Exhale meets *Reservoir Dogs* as four lady friends—Queen Latifah, Jada Pinkett, Vivica Fox, and Kimberly Elise—try to improve their station in life by ripping off banks around Los Angeles. Black director du jour F. Gary Gray takes the well-intended but formulaic script and does his best John Woo impression: lots of guns, lots of slow motion. What makes the film more than just a bunch of neatly choreographed stunts



Latifah and friends

NICOLA GOODE/NEW LINE

is a stellar performance by Latifah as the malt liquor–guzzling, pussy-eating Cleo, a lesbian reincarnation of *Menace II Society*'s O Dawg. *Set It Off* is at its entertaining best when it lets the ladies get their gangsta groove on, but comes up short each time it tries to justify their criminal behavior with preachy clichés about life in the 'hood.

Nicole Jefferson

the funeral
OCTOBER FILMS

In his 10th feature, Abel Ferrara's trademark obsessions—sin, damnation, and redemption—swirl around a '40s-era wake. The film focuses on Christopher Walken, who's searching for his youngest brother's killer while trying to keep his remaining, mentally unbalanced sibling (Chris Penn) on a short leash. Ferrara (*King of New York*, *Bad Lieutenant*) keeps the sex and violence under wraps until the



Christopher Walken

film's climax, making this a cerebral and talky period piece. Walken is near perfect as a grieving man choosing between revenge and salvation, but those looking for a *Godfather*-style epic will be disappointed. Fans of Ferrara, though, will appreciate these mobsters, who quote from Catholic theology the way mafioso-minded rappers cut and paste Mario Puzo.

Gary Dauphin

palookaville
ORION/SAMUEL GOLDWYN

This light-hearted tale of Sid (William Forsythe), Russ (Vincent Gallo), and Jerry (Adam Trese), three Jersey City townies turned reluctant



Adam Trese and Lisa Gay Hamilton

ALISON ROSA

criminals, and their feeble attempt at sticking up an armored car is the kind of film that will have Sixty Second Preview gushing: FEEL-GOOD DRAMEDY OF THE YEAR. Intensely detailed and subtle—almost to a fault—Alan Taylor's feature debut opts for realism and psychological insight over car screeches and gunshots. In its examination of the dreams and dysfunctions of the less-than-working class, *Palookaville* succeeds in bringing humanity—in all its snotty, malodorous glory—to the big screen.

Robert Marriott





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tv

hoop dreamin'

Earl "the Goat" Manigault's tragic life becomes a movie

The route to becoming a basketball street legend in New York is a paradoxical one. On one hand, you have to succeed in performing the inconceivable on the court. On the other, you have to be an underachiever and fail to take your game to the pros. Or worse, you have to fail in life and take down everyone's hopes with you, so that people will forever wonder how great a player you might have been.

Among the greatest of New York legends is Earl "the Goat" Manigault, who's now the subject of an HBO movie titled *Rebound* (premiering November 23). Directed by Eriq LaSalle (from *ER*) and starring Don Cheadle (*Devil in a Blue Dress*) as the Goat, the film is an honest, colorful portrayal of Manigault's enormously tragic life.

At six foot one, Manigault was a little man who became known on the courts of Harlem for "flushing it" (an N.Y.C. term for dunking) on big men (including, once, Wilt Chamberlain) and blocking shots in his trademark, pin-it-against-the-backboard style. In one game, he flushed it so hard on two six-foot-eight high school All-Americans that the crowd lost it and started throwing chairs onto the court. "Stuff guys are doing in the pros now, I was doing 35 years ago," says Manigault, 52, sitting on a bench at 98th and Amsterdam, the site of a park named in his honor.



CRAIG BLANKENHORN

Don Cheadle, the Goat, and friend

In the early '60s Manigault was the star player at New York's Benjamin Franklin High and then at the Laurinburg Institute in Laurinburg, N.C., to which he transferred in his senior year. He went on to play ball at Johnson C. Smith College in Charlotte but left after only one season because of personal problems and differences with the coach. Back in New York, he became addicted to heroin and ended up doing an 18-month bid for weapons possession.

Today, Manigault—who's organized a basketball tournament called The Goat Walk Away From Drugs Tournament—doesn't like to dwell on how far he might have gone. "I whipped [my addiction], and now I'm doing something positive with the kids," he says. "Hopefully, the movie will work for them, keep them away from the streets and penitentiaries."

Although *Rebound* offers further proof of Don Cheadles's fine acting abilities, it's unlikely that it will land him a tryout with the Vancouver Grizzlies any time soon—capturing Manigault's proficiency and dazzle on the court may be an impossibility for any living actor. Could Jordan have portrayed him? "Yeah, but I don't think he could've captured my ball playing either. Similar games, but he's still not coming out the gutter with stuff like I did." Straight from the horse's, I mean the Goat's, mouth. *Bobbito Garcia*

'no more pain'

Tupac finds the afterlife in last video


BOB M

By now you've probably seen the video for Tupac's "I Ain't Mad at 'Cha": the one in which 'Pac is shot to death, goes to heaven, and becomes a guardian angel; the one that MTV premiered (and played hourly) three days after Tupac's real-life demise; the one that invited sensational headlines like: EERIE FINAL VIDEO PREDICTS DEATH.

Eerie? Sure, especially when you listen to Tupac rapping over the images, "Picture us inside a ghetto heaven / In my chest I feel pain." But hardly a surprise. From "Bury Me a G" to "If I Die Tonight," Tupac has always grappled with mortality (his own end others') In his music. Even this final video—directed by Kevin Swain and shot in June—is ectually a variation on another video that Tupac himself directed for Oakland rapper Mac Mall's '94 debut, "Ghetto Theme." In that clip Tupac kills Mac Mall, whose spirit then haunts 'Pac and makes him repent his murderous sins. The difference in this version Is that Tupac no longer plays the loser but the lost; leaving behind his homie, played by real-life friend Bokeem Woodbine, as well as us to mourn.

"I Ain't Mad at 'Cha" is just the last chapter In the life of a man who never seemed fully comfortable with his place on earth. He often cited a troubled childhood, the lack of e father, an inability to fit in. Like many in our generation who've felt the same, he feared anonymity more than death, wondering if people would appreciate him more after he was gone. Seeing images of Tupac walking in the clouds while his friends grieve below, you can't help but hear enother of his self-conscious lines: "How long will they mourn me?" How long, indeed. *Minya Oh*

happy days are here again


PHOTOFEST

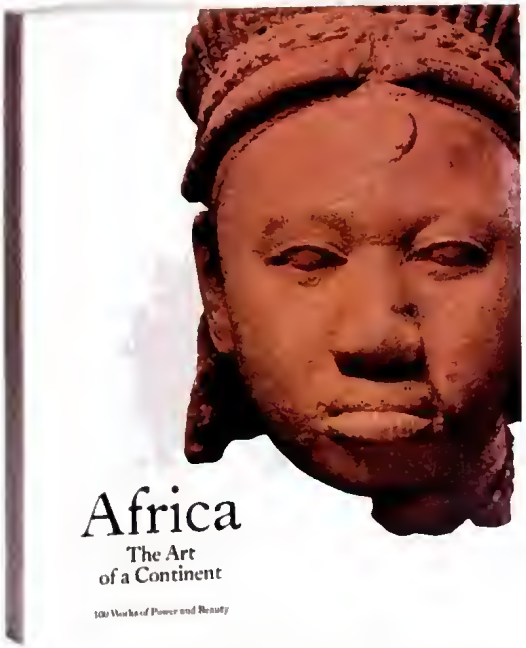
Set back in the day when e hood was a person not a piece, and black people were heard but not seen, *Happy Days* (Nick At Nite, 8:30 p.m.) was one of those classic '70s brain-optional sitcoms. In its faux-'50s milieu, McCarthyism, the cold war, and Jim Crow all stood out on the stoop in favor of more pressing issues—like whether Jenny Piccalo was going to bum-rush Joanie's chances of being head majorette or whether Chachi would ever grow pubes. In truth, *Happy Days*' bone-white, plastic fantasy world might have been as terrifying in its day as, say, *Full House* is in ours, were it not for the fact that Arthur Fonzarelli was a true mack daddy (even though he bit his moves from Jimmy Dean). As we wetched, we knew In our secret hearts that, like the Fonz, we were cooler than cool. It took e nation of Potsies to hold us back. *Jeff Yang*


"I brought you in this world...
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word

homeland artifacts

Africa: The Art of a Continent (Prestel Verlag) chronicles a recent exhibit of African art displayed at New York City's Guggenheim Museum (previously at London's Royal Academy of Arts), which is arguably the most comprehensive such show ever assembled. Edited by artist and curator Tom Phillips, the book contains introductory essays by Cornel West and Henry Louis Gates and is divided into chronological and geographical sections that include ancient Egypt, Southern and Central Africa, West Africa, the



Guinea Coast, and Northern Africa. This beautiful edition highlights the sublime talents of countless anonymous African artists. Works rarely seen in the U.S., like the haunting seven-part Qur'an from 14th-century Cario, are featured, as are a 1.6 million–year-old hand tool forged from the Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania (one of the oldest known human artifacts) and the angular and powerful wood masks of the Dan people from Liberia and the Ivory Coast, which inspired Picasso. Since Africa is home to thousands of peoples and cultures, some purists have complained that this overview presentation takes the artwork out of the proper cultural and geographic contexts; nevertheless, this collection is an excellent introduction to the timeless and vast genius of the motherland. *Eugene Holley, Jr.*



meditations on the negress

Hilton Als's first book, *The Women* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), is a rare hybrid of memoir, literary criticism, and racial essay. Als (a former VIBE editor) displays a heightened sense of empathy with his use of the archaic term "Negress," which describes both his mother and, perversely, himself, in his scathing yet compassionate dissection of black-male sensibilities. With muted anger, he vividly evokes the existence of childish, pampered men. Als's Negress becomes a unique literary spectacle whose very identity is fashioned from her pride, her stoicism, and her disappointment.

On the criticism front, his examination of Malcolm X's resentment toward his mother's intelligence and mixed-race background is bound to be a source of heated discussion. Als also flays the texts of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison for their sentimental reliance on the Negress as mute, long-suffering victim. All in all, *The Women* affirms the primacy of the Negress, in both personal and literary terms, as an indomitable character in the American psyche.

Georgs Pitts

the clash debunked

Throughout their career, punk pioneers the Clash managed to seduce, convert, and confound fans and critics alike. In *Last Gang in Town* (Henry Holt), Marcus Gray sets out to shatter the myths surrounding the group once proclaimed as "the only band that matters." While this exhaustive, 505-page unauthorized biography is packed with information, it would have benefited from current interviews with the band members. But its biggest shortcoming is the lack of any in-depth analysis of the diverse (mostly black) musical genres—dub reggae, R&B, and rap—that informed and influenced their work. That commitment to experimentation set the Clash apart from their rivals, the Sex Pistols, and other bands of the '70s punk explosion.

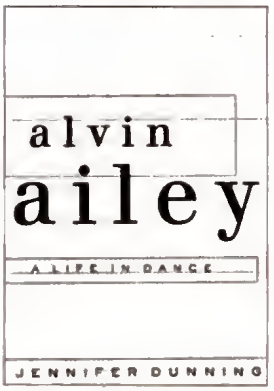
But where the Pistols' resounding effect on the zeitgeist inspired Jon Savage's superlative 1992 memoir, *England's Dreaming*, Clash fans will have to settle for the incomplete *Last Gang in Town*. They—and this pivotal band—deserve better.



Joe Angio

revelations of ailey

In *Alvin Ailey: A Life in Dance* (Addison Wesley), *New York Times* critic Jennifer Dunning leads us on a step-by-step



journey through the life of one of the dance world's most influential figures. Spanning Ailey's poor Texas roots through his world tours and collaborations with dancer/protégée Judith Jamison, composer Duke Ellington, and writer Langston Hughes to his death in 1989 from AIDS, this book paints a stirring portrait of the man behind the world-renowned name.

Culling anecdotes by troupe members and personal notes Ailey compiled throughout his career, Dunning celebrates the dancer/choreographer as a talented, troubled, hard-working genius, whose legacy is still vital today. But *Dance* also reveals a man who struggled with his homosexuality and who ultimately suffered a psychological breakdown. While the monotonous facts of Ailey's day-to-day life weigh down the text some, *A Life in Dance* is an enlightening read that no dance fan should miss.

Dyani Sexton

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tech

adult toys

Christmas is coming, the goose is getting phat....As retailers prepare their annual assault on your hard-earned money, now's a good time to do some strategic planning of your own. The following are some top-shelf variations on familiar gift themes, suitable for giving—but better for receiving.

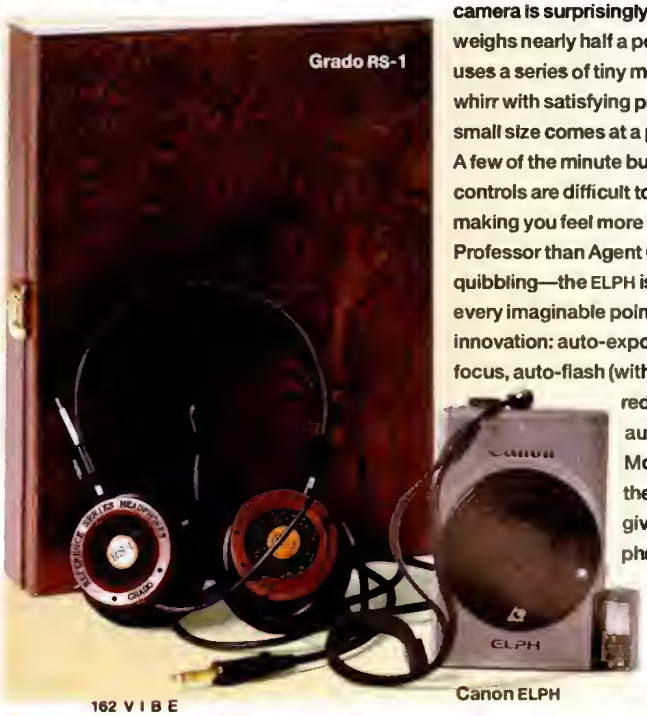
future shock

From a purely functional point of view, a clock radio has but one purpose: to get your tired ass out of bed each morning. Unfortunately, such narrow design parameters lead to notoriously low-quality sound—tiny speakers with the sonic oomph of a Mr. Microphone. The **Bose Wave** radio ($349) makes waking up a more civilized experience. The sweet sounds emanating from this sleek, fan-shaped unit (complete with an auxiliary jack for a CD player) come courtesy of Bose's patented waveguide technology, which utilizes an intestinelike maze of tubes through which sound waves are forced and made stronger. At low volumes the effect is negligible, but as you increase the levels, mid-range sounds (particularly vocals) take on an expansive warmth as mellow, room-filling bass floats in the air. The only person who might not appreciate the Wave is your boss, since it gives you one more reason to stay in bed.



Bose Wave

With its cool, anodized steel industrial design and eye-popping size (not much larger than a pack of cigarettes), the **Canon ELPH** ($400) is perhaps the closest any of us will ever get to playing James Bond. Don't let its size fool you, this camera is surprisingly sturdy; it weighs nearly half a pound and uses a series of tiny motors that whirr with satisfying precision. The small size comes at a price, though: A few of the minute buttons and controls are difficult to manipulate, making you feel more like the Nutty Professor than Agent 007. But that's quibbling—the ELPH is loaded with every imaginable point-and-shoot innovation: auto-exposure, auto-focus, auto-flash (with red-eye reduction), and auto-rewind. More important, the camera gives photographers the option of three print sizes: conventional, wide-angle, and panoramic. The ELPH is a precision instrument that thinks it's a toy.



Canon ELPH

The **Grado RS-1** headphones ($700) are probably the best set of 'phones that you will ever...see. The ear cups are made of beautifully finished mahogany—the same material used in its ridiculously attractive presentation case. Fortunately, beauty, in this case, is more than veneer-deep: The Grados have a rich sound—not artificially bright like less expensive 'phones. But resist the temptation to turn these suckas out. Like all headphones, they sound best at mid-volume—too low and you lose the spatial effects of sound-staging; too high and you miss the subtle sonic detailing that distinguishes a good pair of ear cans. The Grados offer two thrills for the price of one: When you're not listening to 'em, you can always *look* at 'em.

Wook Kim

sofa-spud action

Once the video-game leader, Nintendo has found itself playing catch-up to Sony and Sega ever since those companies introduced their 32-bit PlayStation and Saturn systems, respectively, last year. But with its long-awaited **Nintendo 64 System** ($199.95), Nintendo is making a bid to become a pixel playa once again.



Nintendo 64 System



Mortal Kombat Trilogy



NBA HangTime

Unlike its rivals, the Nintendo 64 is cartridge-based, which eliminates those endless waits while the game boots up. Its eye-popping graphics and fast play also propel Nintendo to the front of the video-game class. The controller resembles something out of *Star Trek*—with multiple-action buttons, it's palm friendly and comfortable. Moreover, Nintendo 64 can accommodate as many as four players (additional controllers must be purchased to play simultaneously).

Of course, a system is only as good as the software available. Currently there are only 12 games in the Nintendo 64 arsenal, none of which are shipped with the unit. Super Mario 64 brings you 15 worlds of great scenery, huge enemies, and more than 30 moves. **Mortal Kombat Trilogy** and **NBA HangTime** were in "beta" at press time but hold great promise (their use of Nintendo 64's graphic and sound capabilities is revolutionary). Software manufacturers will have to unleash a multitude of games to combat PlayStation's domination of the game market. Nintendo, however, has provided an excellent platform.

Gregg Bishop

THIS IS MY INSTRUMENT.

Photo courtesy of Strictly Rhythm



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REVOLUTIONS



Prodigy, Havoc

MOBB DEEP 'HELL ON EARTH'

LOUD

BY CHAIRMAN MAO

"Fuck where you're at, kid, it's where you're from," rhymed Mobb Deep's Havoc on "Right Back At You"—one of several outstanding compositions from the duo's brilliantly belligerent 1995 sophomore LP, *The Infamous*. With that agitated sentiment, partners-in-rhyme Havoc and Prodigy obliterated the spiritual message of one of hip hop's most lasting and oft-quoted axioms (Rakim's "It ain't where you from, it's where you at" from 1987's "I Know You Got Soul"), twisting it into a foreboding word of warning appropriate for an alienated, territorial constituency devoid of optimism.

Spearheaded by such anthemic pavement pounders as "Shook Ones Pt. 2," "Survival of the Fittest," and "Give Up the Goods," *The Infamous* established Mobb Deep as their generation's troubled spokesmen, whose cold worldview occasionally extended beyond their Queensbridge housing-project existence. With expertly executed, at times even pleasantly melodic, music setting the foundation (much of it assisted incognito by A Tribe Called Quest's Q-Tip), an abundance of quotable lyrics affirmed the Mobb mentality of poetic street justice: "No matter how much loot I get I'm stayin' in the projects forever"; "Now you fuckin' with kids that's lifeless."

One year later, Mobb Deep's elegant symphony of brutality commences its third movement. Even darker than its predecessor, *Hell on Earth* is yet another astounding work that impresses with its unswaying devotion to the group's disturbingly insular environment. With Havoc triumphantly commanding the production duties, the edgier, orchestra-dominated tracks generally neglect the random melodious ironies of *The Infamous* for a soundgarden that ups the intensity way past normal comfort levels. Amid cascading string swells and piano chords, self-awareness briefly rears its head on "Animal Instinct" ("I'm tired of living life this way / Crime pay / But for how long? / 'Til you reach a downfall"); but any notions of Mobb going the straight and narrow are rubbed out as rapidly as potential adversaries are in their songs.

As on *The Infamous*, interaction with the outside world is relegated to a handful of confrontational scenarios. On "More Trife Life," Havoc's visit with an inviting shortie acquaintance goes awry with a kidnapping and ends with a suitably fractured moral: "Take it from a nigga / Don't never go see a bitch." Over a melancholy *Love Story*–style piano, "Drop a Gem" is a preassassination response to the late Tupac Shakur, whose volatile remarks regarding Prodigy's condition as a victim of sickle cell anemia on his diatribe "Hit 'Em Up" so enraged the Mobb that their venomous lyrics prophesize Shakur's demise with alarming clarity: "Clocks tick / Your days are numbered in low digits...Think fast or get reminded / Of robberies in Manhattan / You know what happened / 60 G's worth of gunclappin' / Who shot ya? /You probably screamed louder than a opera / New York gotcha...."

These moments, however, provide mere appetizers to *Hell on Earth*'s main course of malcontent. "Me and my man pioneered this violent nigga rap shit / Bust ya gat, kid / Me no fear that / I'm laughin'," Prodigy rhymes on "Bloodsport" over a lilting, celestial string loop. True to such claims, the Mobb display their businesslike acuity for verbal beatdowns and slice-of-street-life narratives with the surefire chemistry of a cynical and streetwise EPMD. As Havoc and Prodigy repeat trademark mantric refrains masquerading as choruses, the dramatic tension elevates paeans to hostility such as "G.O.D. Pt. 3," "Can't Get Enough of It," and "Get Dealt With" to levels of near-cinematic majesty.

Most affecting is the title track, in which Prodigy's final verse explores the evil that young men do in simple, unremorseful terms. "I ain't your average cat / Fuck rap / I'm trying to make C.R.E.A.M., and that's that / Whatever it takes, however it gots to go down / Four mikes onstage / Or motherfuckin' four pound / Speakers leakin' out sound / Or niggas leakin' on the ground."

Like modern bluesmen documenting their lives to inevitable, ill-fated conclusions, Mobb Deep deliver their songs with the pathos-stained tones of raw emotion gone numb.

With a series of equally disarming guest appearances (a menacing Method Man on "Extortion"; Raekwon on the 'Bridge-meets–*The Bird*s "Nighttime Vultures"; and Big Noyd and Nas on the QBC star-studded "Give It Up Fast"), *Hell on Earth* contains no shortage of memory-soiling material. The group's hateful, self-destructive tendencies are destined to offend the PC and faint of heart, but the thoroughly unglamorous, uncontrived nature of Mobb Deep's *modus operandi* places them in a category apart from both today's uninspired "reality rhyme" merchants and rap-regulating moral heavyweights. Like modern bluesmen documenting their lives to inevitable, ill-fated conclusions, Mobb Deep deliver their songs with the pathos-stained tones of raw emotion gone numb.

"Raise the stakes up / Hit you from the waist up / That's how it is / And how it is, is kinda fucked up," Havoc explains succinctly on "Get Dealt With" before presciently concluding, "But the beat's bangin', got your whole clique singin'." Truly hip hop's antiheroes, Mobb Deep keep it realer than you or I could possibly imagine. Tell a friend.

MILES DAVIS & GIL EVANS 'THE COMPLETE COLUMBIA STUDIO RECORDINGS' COLUMBIA/LEGACY

As a rule, I prefer Miles Davis's small-band recordings to the epic orchestral projects he and Gil Evans collaborated on. The reasons are probably as much psychological as musical: I'm the type of guy who'll take a lyric moment over an epic journey any day. If you prefer poetry over novels, chamber groups over operas, De La Soul over Public Enemy, you'll get the drift.



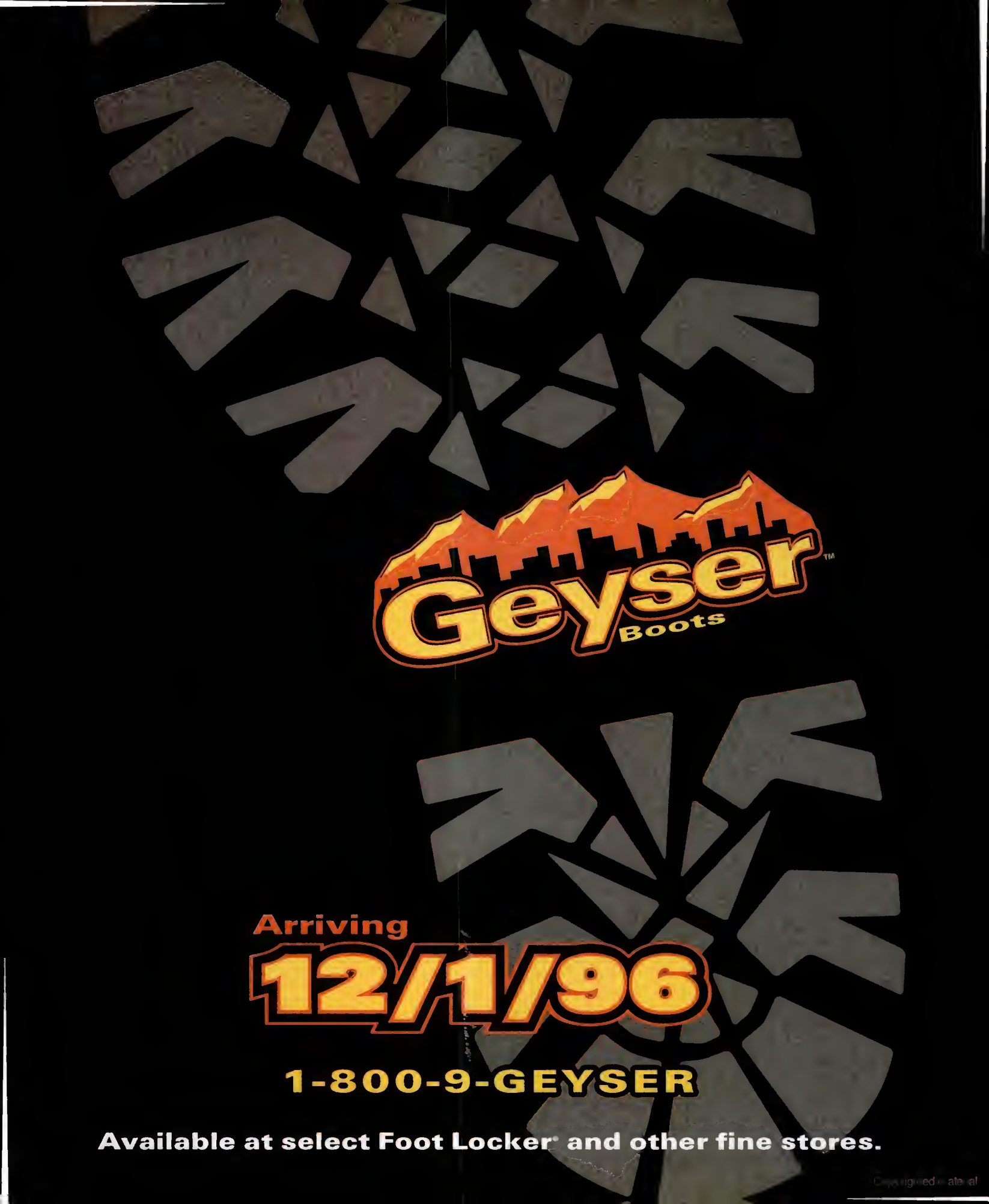
This is not to dis Miles and Gil's formidable achievements, comprehensively collected and bound in *The Complete Columbia Studio Recordings*, a gorgeously packaged boxed set whose embossed gold jacket contains six CDs and 197 pages of photographs and liner notes. What made Davis and Evans ideal collaborators has everything to do with shared sensibilities and a mutual objective: forcing intimacy and humility upon two of the most overblown devices in music–the trumpet and the orchestra.

By the mid-'50s, the tone-conscientious Davis had scaled down the horn from its heraldic bum-rushing function of biblical days, transforming the instrument into something more diaristic, a traveling companion sensitive to the artist's deepest and most fleeting feelings. Likewise, Evans's extremely personal orchestrations took the brutish roar out of humongous brass sections (though not the swing), making them float like Muhammad Ali's proverbial butterfly and sting like his rapid-fire right hook.

The results of the Davis/Evans union were the historic recordings we know as *Miles Ahead* (1957), *Porgy and Bess* (1958), and *Sketches of Spain* (1960). Also included here, however, is their aborted 1964 bossa nova adventure, *Quiet Nights* (less than 30 minutes of music were deemed releasable, and Miles and Gil hated the fact that it came out at all), and every outtake extant from these major works. In the liner notes, we discover that these albums were way ahead of their time in using overdubbing and studio-editing techniques; a master take of "I Don't Wanna Be Kissed (By Anyone but You)" recorded for *Miles Ahead* was constructed by splicing together material from eight alternate takes.

REVOLUTIONS / EVOLUTIONS

Reading the persnickety discography by scholar Phil Schapp makes the sweat that went into these Herculean recordings splash up from the pages. Davis and Evans took their time with these projects knowing that they were venturing into uncharted territory by merging European concert music and African-American classical music. That we're still giving them both ovations today is a testament to how timeless the fruits of their labors have proven to be. *Greg Tate*


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READER RECORD REVIEW



XZIBIT • At The Speed of Life • *Laud Records*

If popular hip hop these days is nothing more than wannabe rappers posing as gangsta/MC's, Los Angeles' Xzibit is far from typical. "A lot of people have told me that when they hear my album," he says, "it's refreshing. I'm trying to set a trend and that's what you're *supposed* to do with your first album." On his debut album *At The Speed of Life*, the Detroit-born artist makes no pretenses—he paints gritty, no-nonsense pictures of life on the street.

Truth be told, most of the music on *At The Speed of Life* is fairly simple: a minimal drum beat overlaid with subtle sampling and instrumentation. But the rhyme is the focus here, and Xzibit's grave monotone conveys his worldly-wise message with a maturity that defies his years. The first single, "Paparazzi," is far and away the best song on the album, a scathing indictment of the rap world-gone-Hollywood backed by smooth female crooning. "The Foundation," an open letter to his infant son, features actual cries of Xzibit's baby. Produced by Cypress Hill's DJ Muggs, the song is both deeply personal and emotionally charged; in Xzibit's wards, "heartfelt."

Though the rest of the album isn't as exciting, if nothing else *At The Speed of Life* represents a transition from the violence and misogyny of past hip hop to the introspective, pasitive hip hop of the future. And that's revolutianary.

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TONY TONI TONÉ 'HOUSE OF MUSIC' MERCURY

REVOLUTIONS SHOUTOUTS



Before D'Angelo spawned the current '70s soul revival, the groovy trio Tony Toni Toné—drummer Timothy Christian Riley, guitarist Dwayne Wiggins, and singer/bassist/keyboardist Raphael Saadiq—were already collecting platinum discs. Coming straight outta Oakland, where Sly Stone was born and Ike Turner now lays his processed head, the Tonies' workshop was built on various schools of black pop: Motown, Philadelphia International, and Solar Records. Yet unlike Lenny Kravitz, who has never been able to crack black radio, the retro mind states that created the muddywater jam "Little Walter" and the sentimental bubble-bath splash of "Anniversary" have consistently been a smooth sensation in America's chocolate cities.

Although it was rumored that the band were going from soulsville to splitsville when group members began working on outside projects (Raphael jamming with D'Angelo, Timothy with Art N' Soul), the sons of soul have returned with their fourth disc, *House of Music*. While new jack soul boys explore the textures of Stevie Wonder and Marvin Gaye, this trio choose to dig deeper into the archives of R&B culture, using influences as diverse as Earth, Wind & Fire ("Holy Smokes & Gee Whiz"), Al Green ("Thinking About You"), and Phil Spector's wall of sound ("Let Me Know"). Not simply xeroxing the soundtracks of their youth, the Tonies use their elders as sketches for their personalized, complete sound paintings.

When Tony Toni Toné decide to go commercial, as on their first single, "Let's Get Down," featuring hometown rapper DJ Quik, the results can be mixed. Brilliance shines like a diamond, however, on the masterful "Say My Name," which oozes from the speakers like honey, and the enchanting "Still a Man." Like a blaxploitation flick soundtrack, *House of Music* glows a vision of blackness that is superbad, mad smooth, and crazy sexy. *Michael A. Gonzales*



LUSCIOUS JACKSON 'FEVER IN FEVER OUT'

GRAND ROYAL/CAPITOL

With *Fever In Fever Out*, a more curvaceous Luscious Jackson abandon the shaky, hip hop–flavored fervor of their 1994 LP *Natural Ingredients* for a more mature brand of melodiousness. Aided by producers Daniel Lanois (U2, Peter Gabriel) and Tony Mangurian, the N.Y.C. quartet run their plays with veteran savvy. Too bad bassist Jill Cunniff's whispered vocals are layered atop sensual but repetitive arrangements that eventually wear down the ears like a full-court press. While a possible remedy could have been the group's knack for evoking other musical eras—the snazzy '60s-ish cocktail mix of "Mood Swing," guitarist Gabrielle Glaser's funkdafied, late-'70s/early-Prince "Electric," and the '80s-flashback "Under Your Skin"—*Fever*'s inconsistencies prevent a full recovery. *Gabriel Alvarez*


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REVOLUTIONS 2 MOTIVLOVE

BOOM SHOTS

BY ROB KENNER

Like Dirtman's sample on De La Soul's "Itsoweezee" says: "It's getting hot this year." But amid all the madness, you must remember...

•Beenie Man and Carlene the curvaceous dancehall queen hooking up and breaking up.

•Ninjaman bursting back onto the scene—the return of the Don Gorgon.

•Sunsplash flopping, despite standout performances by Super Cat, Sanchez, Leroy Smart, Admiral Bailey, and Reggie Stepper.

•The original Flatbush dogainuffin going from one-hit wonder to Mr. Lover Lover. Shaggy's *Boombastic* platinum single and album made him dancehall's top breadwinner this year.

•Bob Marley riddims taking over the dancehall again, from the "Heathen" (blessed by Cocoa Tea, Shabba Ranks, Tony Rebel, Buju, and dozens more) to "One Drop," "Duppy Conqueror," "Sun Is Shining," and "Time Will Tell." Just to make it official, two of Bob's sons, Damian and Julian, released albums of their own on Ghetto Youths International/Tuff Gong, both produced by Melody Maker Stephen Marley. "Dem ago tired fi see we face / Can't get we outta the race."


Beres Hammond

•Cecil Willington, a.k.a Nicodemus, succumbed to complications from diabetes at age 39. Mr. Fabulous was a founding father of the cool and deadly monotone deejay style. His longtime sparring partner Super Cat was at his side until the end. Nuff respect.

These were the '96 licks:

ARTIST OF THE YEAR: Beres Hammond. Singer, songwriter, arranger, producer, raconteur, Beres is Jamaica's Babyface and then some. This year he delivered another superlative album, *Love From a Distance* (V.P.), packed with warm and easy melodies for ticking time bombs ("What a Life") and lounging lovers ("Highlight of the Day"). Plus, Hammond's Harmony House stable is grooming vocal talents like Robert French and Mr. Eazy.

DEEJAY OF THE YEAR: Bounty Killer.

Rodney Price and the Scare Dem crew are accepting no losses. His *My Experience* CD (Blunt/V.P.) is the most relentlessly hardcore dancehall album since Super Cat's *Don Dada*. Even when sparring with a galaxy of guest stars—Raekwon, the Fugees, Busta Rhymes, Junior Reid, and Barrington Levy—the Killer is in full control.

RIDDIM OF THE YEAR: The "Old Dog" (Xtra Large).

When it comes to the jumpup, production genius Dave Kelly still has the technology to dust out all rivals.

LIVE PERFORMANCE OF THE YEAR: Luciano at Reggae Sunfest.

Ever since that show, the Bob comparisons have gotten out of hand. A new album is due soon, so let's wait and see....

UP-AND-COMING ARTIST OF THE YEAR: Frisco Kid.

He can be sweet ("Little & Cute") or salty ("Think We Nice"), and his stage show sparkles with energy. Watch this youth in '97.

UNDERRATED ARTIST OF THE YEAR: Rayvon.

Shaggy's silky-smooth secret weapon. We're ready for the solo joint.

LABEL OF THE YEAR: East Coast Records

ROOTS/DUB LABEL OF THE YEAR: Blood & Fire

DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE YEAR: MTV's *Reggae Soundsystem*

DISGRACE OF THE YEAR: Resurgence of batty boy lyrics

DANCEHALL DESIGNERS/MODELS OF THE YEAR: The Ouch Crew

SOUNDCLASH OF THE YEAR: Kilimanjaro vs. King Addies.

Jamaica and Amenca's top killing sounds became major rivals over the last year. Rematch set to unfold soon in New York City. Stay tuned.

GIMMICK OF THE YEAR: *Fire on the Mountain: Reggae Celebrates the Grateful Dead* (Pow Wow). Henry K's brilliant concept album is sure to keep selling well into the next century. Even if you feel (as I do) that the Dead's concerts were overrated, their songwriting skills can't be denied after hearing their music interpreted by the Mighty Diamonds, Judy Mowatt, Michael Rose, and Dennis Brown.

Q

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Nco Trybe/Virgin

258 Tracey Lee
"The Theme"
By Storm Entertainment

October Poll Results: Well A Tribe Called Quest has no need to be "Stressed Out." Their single was Jammed by 80%...Originoo Gunn Clappaz are showing "No Fear." They were Jammed by 70% of listeners...It seems fans of Bring In 'Da Noise, Bring in 'Da Funk are split. 60% Jammed the single "Drummin'/Taxi," while 60% Slammed the title song "Bring In 'Da Noise, Bring In 'Da Funk"...Ras Kass should do a little more praying. His single "On Earth As It Is..." was Jammed by only 53%.



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ASHFORD & SIMPSON WITH MAYA ANGELOU 'BEEN FOUND' HOPSACK & SILK/ICHIBAN

Who could have guessed that on their collaborative project, *Been Found*, Ashford & Simpson with Maya Angelou would trample on each other's gifts? Admittedly, on the Nile Rodgers–produced "Where We Come From," Angelou's motherly rumbles (imagine a mellow Nina Simone) complement Nick and Vai's breezy groove. But even that's not enough. On the title track, Angelou's affecting poetry is up to par but impossible to enjoy, as it's interrupted by the duo's syrupy, high-pitched harmonies and rudimentary beats. And the turntable scratchin' on "This Time it's Real" is as over as Nick's hair. Perhaps Angelou should have stuck with Branford Marsalis's rendition of "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings."

Joyce E. Davis


Valerie, Maya, Nick

AARON RAPOPORT

ORIGINOO GUNN CLAPPAZ 'DA STORM' DUCK DOWN ENTAPRIZAZ/ PRIORITY

They'd give your third-grade reading teacher nightmares. In a genre full of bad spellers, Brooklyn's Boot Camp Clik are hands down the worst. Street-schooled Clik groups Smif-N-Wessun (now the Cocoa Brovas), Heltah Skeltah, and Originoo Gunn Clappaz throw traditional textbooks out the window and spell hip hop's words the way they sound in Bucktown.

O.G.C.'s debut album, *Da Storm*, sheds light on the method behind the madness of all the twisted syntax. Clappaz Starang Wondah, Louieville Sluggah, and Top Dog bend their words around beats until the pronunciations fit the flow of the music. Pedantic stuff like definitions and grammar fall to the side. The first single, "No Fear," ends with the words "What's up" chanted 20 times in a row. As a beautifully hypnotic, O'Jays-inspired bass line carries the weight, the words blur in repetition, becoming one long melodic line. It's not what they're saying, of course, but how they're saying it.

REVOLUTIONS EVOLUTIONS

See, creative spelling is just the tip of the iceberg. Following up on an old Boot Camp in-joke ("As they say in Eshkoshkan, 'Leflaur, Leflah, Eshkoshka' "), O.G.C.'s verbiage often slips into a jabberwockian language all its own. "Pa-poi-poi," Top Dog says during the stoned daze of "Calm Before da Storm." What's that mean? How do you spell it? Who cares—it *sounds* good.

As usual, the Beatminerz production team satisfies with simplicity. Heavy-boot beats laced with dreamy organ chords and ticking high hats support the MC trio during the hot-potato verse trades. So while the bookworms in the front row win first-place spelling-bee ribbons, O.G.C. huddle in a cipher at the back of the class and master the more important lessons of life.

David Bry


Louieville, Starang, Top Dog


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has been
settled
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for all.
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20 QUESTIONS

REVOLUTIONS SHOTGUN LOVE

1. Should we be mad or glad that we don't have to drop $8.50 to go see *Set It Off* since Bone Thugs-N-Harmony's "Days of our Livez" video gave away the entire plot?

2. Considering that Jaÿ-Z wants a woman who's "half black, half Filipino," Ghostface was checking for a sister who was "half Hawaiian with a touch of Chinese," and Rakim's girl "almost looked Korean, but European" (and her name was Mahogany), you think, maybe, just maybe, folks are still colorstruck? **3.** What's up with Toni Braxton and Celine Dion both making videos in which their boyfriends die in motorcycle accidents? **4.** Considering the recent investigation concerning their involvement with the distribution of drugs in urban communities, shouldn't the Central Intelligence Agency change its name to the Crack Implanting Agency? **5.** And speaking of acronyms, with shows like *Homeboys in Outer Space* and *Moesha* (on which Onyx's Fredro Starr will be a regular this season), does UPN stand for "U People's Network?" **6.** Upon witnessing Esther Rolle's new psychic phenomenon commercials, didn't you, but for one second, really want to *believe*? **7.** Which is the better word for what Shades's single "Tell Me" did to Bernard Wright's 1983 "Who Do You Love": disrespect or desecrate? **8.** Isn't Chris Rock's HBO special *Bring the Pain* the funniest comedy show since Eddie Murphy's *Delirious*? **9.** Is it a good thing when black men are cast as intelligent computer nerds (e.g, Samuel L. Jackson in *Jurassic Park*, Joe Morton in *Terminator 2*) or a bad thing, since they're usually the cause of the demise of mankind? **10.** *Ahem*, speaking of the demise of mankind, why are we four years from the 21st century, and folks are still beefing over colors and coasts? **11.** Why hasn't everybody read poet/playwright/librettist Thulani Davis's new book, *Maker of Saints*? **12.** Dionne Farris—where are you? **13.** Since Whitney Houston bought the screen rights to the book *How to Marry a Black Man*, do you think she's wondering why she married *that* black man? **14.** Have you ever just fallen into a RZA track and found yourself blissfully lost in an action/thriller movie? **15.** And how can the graphics on Nintendo's new Super Mario 64 be so smooth and three-dimensional? **16.** Why, when election issues affect so many of us, don't more of us vote? **17.** Can we name New Edition's sparkling ballad "Home Again" this holiday's theme song? **18.** Which is the bigger cinematic mystery: Eddie Murphy wanting to portray Stevie Wonder or the Fugees planning a sequel to Jimmy Cliff's 1972 classic, *The Harder They Come*? **19.** Hasn't Little Kim become the Millie Jackson of hip hop? **20.** And, oh, what the hell—is Little Kim a "Queen B*#ch," or what?






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BLACK MOON 'DIGGIN' IN DAH VAULTS'

WRECK/NERVOUS



Evil Dee, 5ft, Buckshot

On their exceptional 1993 debut, *Enta da Stage*, Black Moon (who officially parted ways this year) constructed a hip hop classic. Which is why it's so sad that the sequel is a montage of subpar outtakes ("Buckshot's Freestyle Joint"), radio-friendly versions of raw manuscripts ("Kid It's Real," a.k.a. "Shit Iz Real"), and horrible remixes ("How Many Emcees"). What's amazing is that these amateurish beats were created by DJ Evil Dee himself. The saving graces are gems like the Barry White–motivated "I Got Cha Opin'," the Donald Byrd "Wind Parade" version of "Buck 'Em Down," and the raw, B-side appeal of "Murder MCs." But despite *Diggin'*'s best attempts, don't be fooled by cheap imitations.

Warren Coolidge

NATALIE COLE 'STARDUST'

ELEKTRA



Natalie Cole's 19th album, *Stardust*, is what one would call mature. Think: Lena Horne's 1981 recording of her Broadway hit *The Lady and Her Music*, sans all the chatter. Not because *Stardust*—Cole's third release following *Unforgettable With Love*, the phenomenally successful 1991 tribute to her father, the late Nat King Cole—is jazz. Rather, like Horne, Cole's interpretations of standards are all drama-cum-elegance.

If you held any hope (damning the title and theme) that this album might finally be a return to Cole's old, soulful pop style, which produced hits like "This Will Be" and "I've Got Love on My Mind," think again. Mostly, *Stardust* is a collection of sorrowful, familiar tunes from the first half of the century; nonetheless, Cole manages to balance the pain with lots of healthy, in-your-face attitude. In her buoyant yet raw delivery on songs such as "Let's Face the Music and Dance," "Ahmad's Blues," and "Pick Yourself Up," the theme is play. But when the romp is over, Cole's feathery cadence fused with her special brand of soul (the earthy whine) creates rich, textured jewels such as "Love Letters," "There's a Lull in My Life," and "Stardust." However, it's on "When I Fall in Love," another resurrection duet with her father, that Cole works her magic best.

REVOLUTIONS IN SOUL 1996

Although *Stardust* is unquestionably pretty, and Cole further proves her rank as a musician, there are times when you wish she wouldn't play it so safe. Not that every jazz singer has to have Billie's grit, Ella's scat, Cassandra's blues, or Roberta's soul; but honestly, elegance and reminiscence can take the listener only so far. *Stardust*'s continuation of the lamenting, big-selling *Unforgettable* journey is certainly understandable. But now, it's time to let go.

Ipeleng Kgositsile

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JUST THE FACTS
ALL THAT JAZZ

Back in the '30s, jazz was the hip hop of the day, and big bands ruled the land. But as the art form grew creatively and took more risks, it also began to intimidate most Americans despite its homegrown roots. Today, it seems we only buy music when it's been stripped-down and synthesized; this forces potential jazz legends to remain only "promising young musicians." Yet over the long term, jazz greats such as Coltrane continue to sell. A record executive once *slightly* exaggerated: "A quality jazz album will never sell 10 million copies in a year. It may take 50. Madonna may sell today, but in 75 years, who knows? But Dizzy Gillespie? He'll sell records as long as there's civilization." If that's the case, let's hope John Tesh going gold doesn't symbolize the end of the world as we know it. I bet music sucks in Armageddon. ***Compiled by OJ Lima***

ELEVATOR MUSIC	ARTIST	U.S. SALES (since 1991)
Breathless (1992)	Kenny G	7.1 million
Live at Red Rocks (1995)	John Tesh	546,000
Just an Illusion (1992)	Najee	296,000
CLASSICS		
Sketches of Spain (1960)	Miles Davis	189,000
Blue Train (1957)	John Coltrane	126,000
Monk's Music (1957)	Thelonious Monk	15,000
Wynton Marsalis (1981)	Wynton Marsalis	10,000
TALENTED YOUNG LIONS		
Real Quiet Storm (1994)	James Carter	31,000
From This Moment (1994)	Nicholas Payton	9,000
Unveiled (1996)	Marcus Printup	900
Cary On (1995)	Marc Cary	800

Sources: *SoundScan*

ACTRESS COUNTESS VAUGHN'S TOP 10 REVOLUTIONS



AGE: 18
SIGN: Leo
ROOTS: Idaville, OK

CURRENT PLAYLIST:
MAXWELL—*Maxwell's Urban Hang Suite*
CRUCIAL CONFLICT—*The Final Tic*
MONIFAH—*Moods...Moments*
KEITH SWEAT—*Keith Sweat*
112—*112*
MISTA—*Mista*
BLACKSTREET—*Another Level*
NAS—*It Was Written*
RAS KASS—*Soul on Ice*
AALIYAH—*One in a Million*

FAVORITE SLOW JAM —
"Sexy You" (112 interlude)
LAST MOVIE SHE RENTED:
Girl 6
HER FIRST LIVE SHOW:
Jodeci at the Los Angeles Universal Amphitheatre, 1992
SONG SHE SANG TO WIN STAR SEARCH:
"What the World Needs Now Is Love," by Dionne Warwick, when she was 10 years old.

VIBE RATERS
OUR CURRENT OFFICE SOUNDTRACK (IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER)

DAVID BOWIE—"I'm Deranged." Aren't we all.

THE TIME—*What Time Is It?* Funkiest. Silliest. Baddest.

JERU THE DAMAJA—"Ya Playin' Yaself." The prophet speaks.

EVERYTHING BUT THE GIRL—*Amplified Heart.* Trip-hop bop.

DONNA SUMMER—"Love to Love You Baby." Always *the* jam.

NEW EDITION—"Tighten It Up." All grown-up.

CURTIS MAYFIELD—*New World Order.* A joyous order.

CORNERSHOP—"Wog." Pass the papadam.

MTUME—"Juicy Fruit." Sweet, sticky thing.

2PAC—"Brenda's Got a Baby." Remember the time.

TROUBLE FUNK 'TROUBLE FUNK LIVE'

INFINITE ZERO/AMERICAN



For true funkateers, D.C.'s go-go explosion was a bright spot in the Sir Nose-ish early '80s. It was an outlet for those who preferred their funk uncut, and the dance floor was the raison d'être. *Live*, a reissue of a long out-of-print 1981 record, captures one of the scene's heaviest groups. Not so much a collection of songs, it's more a series of extended T-Funk grooves (like the anthemic "Drop the Bomb")—snatches of tunes, motifs, and musical quotes soldered together by layered percussion, greasy horns, and call-and-response vocals. Folks still get down like this in D.C. *Live*'ll make you give it all up too. *Tony Green*

MINT CONDITION 'DEFINITION OF A BAND'

PERSPECTIVE/A&M

REVOLUTIONS AMOTIJOVEM

As far as black music is concerned, the '70s were the era of the big band—Earth, Wind & Fire, Sly & the Family Stone, War, Parliament-Funkadelic: groups respected for both their political consciousness and their musicianship. These days, though, with the exception of folks like the Roots, live instrumentation is heard mostly via samples, and the once omnipresent R&B band has virtually disappeared. But on Mint Condition's third release, *Definition of a Band*, the self-contained, Minneapolis-based septet

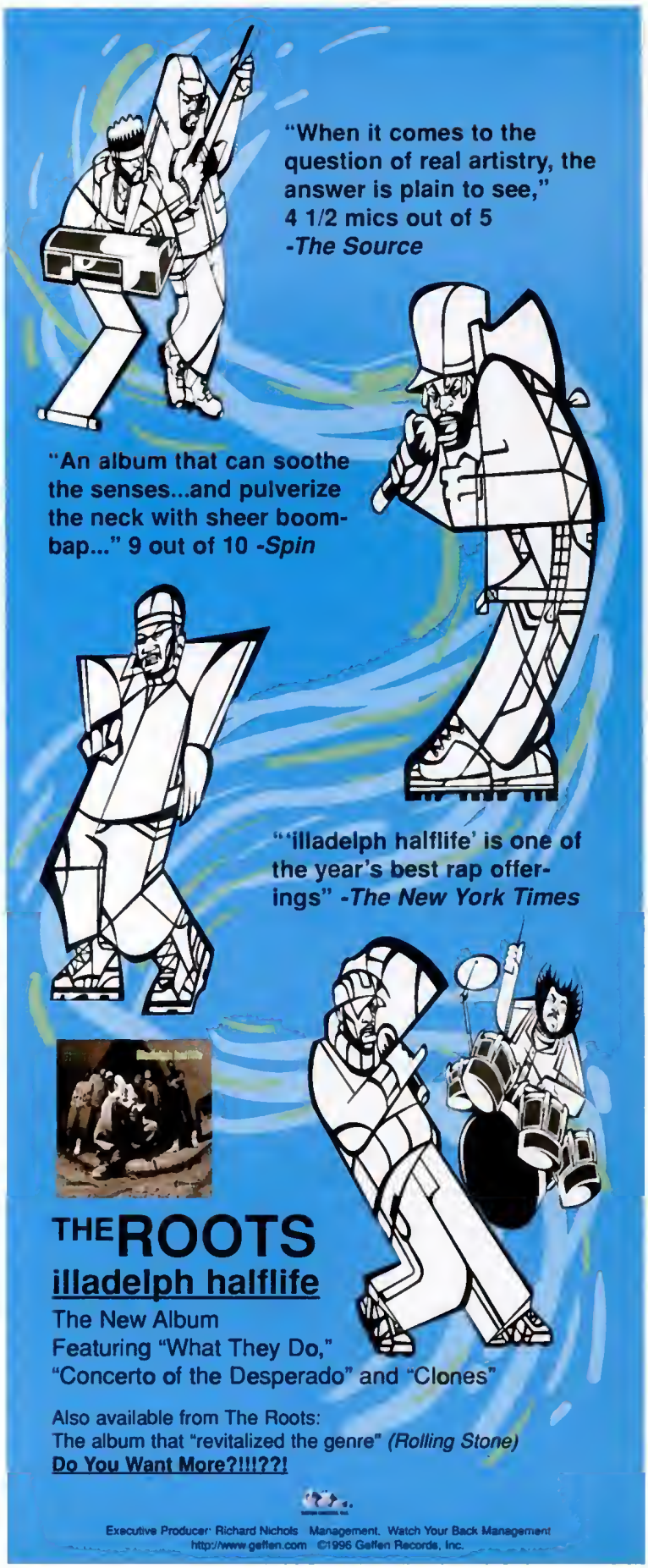


WILLIAM RICHARDS

borrow from their sublime predecessors and combine those lessons with the sensibilities of hometown legends like Prince and the Revolution and the Time.

Blissfully free of remixes, remakes, or guest rappers, the album parlays multitalented members and assured songwriting into one aurally delicious mix. *Definition* is a seamless combination of jazz, rock, R&B, and funk; even the interludes are impressive. But Mint have always been known for balladry ("Pretty Brown Eyes," "You Send Me Swingin' "), and led by the passionate vocals of lead singer and instrumentalist Stokely, they score again with "What Kind of Man Would I Be," a fresh take on fidelity from a man's point of view.

Mint's grooves—as in "Gettin' It On" and "Raise Up"—are tighter than Foxy Brown's spandex. But the album's standout track is "Sometimes": a Sting-meets-Prince-with-Hendrix track that concludes with blistering solos by O'Dell on guitar and Chris "Daddy" Dave on drums. Nowadays, that ain't something you're going to hear on just anybody's record. And in an era when sampling talent supersedes actually having it, Mint Condition's *Definition of a Band* is truly a rare achievement. *Tonya Pendleton*



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Chaka Khan
Faith
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DA BRAT 'ANUTHA-TANTRUM'

SO SO DEF

One of the most amazing things about Jermaine Dupri is his consistent success against seemingly great odds. Xscape? Who woulda known? Bass? Who *coulda* known? Kris Kross? Well, maybe that was obvious. But a solo female MC has always been what larger labels like to call the kiss of death. So when Da Brat's 1994 debut album, *Funkdafied*, went platinum—a solo female first—it was not only slightly baffling ("Funkdafied" was groovy, but it's no "Paper Thin"), it was evidence of J.D.'s magic. And it put girls back in the game.

Discovered by Kris Kross, who invited her onstage at a Chicago show to kick a freestyle, Da Brat—so named because she's supposed to be young enough to get away with throwing tantrums—packed her bags and spent a couple of years in Jermaine's cramped Atlanta home studio perfecting her pitch. Following *Funkdafied*'s fervor, though, Brat had to prove that she wasn't just a Cliffs Notes version of the Doggfather. "They said I sound like Tha Pound," she remembers on *Anuthatantrum*'s first single, "Sittin' on Top of the World." And they were saying it for good reason: Coupled with Dupri's love of Parliament, the Snoop knockoff theory wasn't exactly implausible.

That criticism may have been cushioned by Da Brat's SoundScan victories, but it also seems to have inspired her to take her game to another level. Though the subject matter hasn't changed much (blunts, bitches who want some, niggas who don't know), her delivery has evolved into a wholly respectable, rapid assault. On "Keepin It Live," her freestyle is complicated and quick; "Lyrical Molestation," so named for a Notorious B.I.G. sample (plus a taste of "Who Shot Ya"), proves Da Brat's one of the big boys—here for the long ride. And since there's no reason to start doubting So So Def now, that ride will probably be laced with platinum plaques and lengthy pit stops on the charts.

dream hampton

JOHNNY GILL 'LET'S GET THE MOOD RIGHT'

MOTOWN

On Johnny Gill's third solo effort, his growling baritone fails to deliver the urgent, chocolate-glazed vocals we've come to expect. Instead of one-upping panty-wetting slow jams like "My, My, My" and "There You Go," Gill travels a staid adult contemporary route. Even producers Babyface, Jermaine Dupri, and Jam and Lewis can't help Gill come raw like the younger Teddy Pendergrass he aspires to be. Gill even resurrects that tired red dress on the title track and oversings contrived lyrics like "Let's get the mood right / Turn on your heart light / Baby, let's groove." Turn on your heart light? *Sheesh*. Where's Neil Diamond when ya need him?

Tracy E. Hopkins



REVOLUTIONS & MOTIVATORS



DAVID ROTH

TRICKY 'PRE-MILLENNIUM TENSION' ISLAND

REVOLUTIONS AROUND THE SUN

Sigh. Tricky's trip hop fills you up and satisfies you in places that present-day hip hop can't find or reach. The "trip hop" stamp is one that Tricky (né Adrian Thaws) hates, but there's no other way to describe his glorious, wickedly introverted orchestra of guitar feedback, hypnotic-toned whispers, pretty female vocals, and loops of beats and B-boys from the U.S. shores. (Sorry, Adrian.)

After his experimental hiatus recordings *Nearly God* and *Tricky Presents: Grassroots,* Tricky returns to the more consistent arena he created with his smashing 1995 debut, *Maxinquaye.* Many of *Tension*'s 11 songs are cerebral, ambient mood music that paint lonely, barren pictures of raw anger and isolation. But in all honesty, the album's first half really just makes you want to dance.

Sample the sexy, nocturnal, hip-rolling "Christiansands," in which Tricky, in a gravely whispered chant, describes how he translates hip hop: "I'll manage / Master your language / And in the meantime create my own." Or check out the torso-pumping "Tricky Kid" with its funky kick drum and yelping loops. Even the soulfully romantic ballad "Makes Me Want to Die," with its sleepy vocals by Martine Topley-Bird, begs you to slow dance, while the suffocating chorus of the dark, dank "Vent"—"Can't hardly breathe"—forces you to sway.

The second half of *Tension* is more somber ("My Evil Is Strong," "Piano") and atmospheric ("Bad Things," "Sex Drive"), with the exception of the frantic "Lyrics of Fury," whose rhythmic flurry of words pays lyric homage to the early sounds of Rakim and Big Daddy Kane.

Pre-Millennium Tension is Tricky's best work yet. Call it trip hop, Euro rap, black alternative, or whatever term you fancy. Just don't sleep—if you do, you'll miss out on the chance to get deep.

Omoronke Idowu



PAUL RIDER

Tricky, Martine

TAKE 6 'BROTHERS' REPRISE

If gospel can be characterized as funky, then Take 6's fifth album, *Brothers*, fits the bill—especially since the leadoff is a jazzed-up, trumpet-blaring remake of Earth, Wind & Fire's "Sing a Song." Even Samson's Old Testament woes aren't sacred on the playful "Let Go of Delilah" (reminiscent of "David and Goliath" from their 1988 debut): "She's after your hair / You better beware." But their near-unnatural harmonies are dead serious, as evidenced by the a capella breakdown on "Can't Stop Thinkin' 'Bout You" and the haunting, soul-touching "Jesus Makes Me Happy." After a beautiful celebration like *Brothers*, all that can be said is *Amen*.

Joyce E. Davis

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REVOLUTIONS SHOUTOUTS BY THE BLACKSPOT

NOTES FROM THE
UNDERGROUND

This month, I'd like to give an army-sarge shout-out to all the groups who have been covered in Notes From the Underground throughout the past year, especially those who have had tremendous luck finding deals: The Whoridas are now signed to Delicious Vinyl; the Last Emperor is negotiating with a few labels; J-Live, the Owtlawz, Eboni, Infinite, Thrust, Blind Mice, Plastech Mecanix, and all the other crews/soloists are getting their shine and boosting their record sales. It's all love, baby paw!

Speaking of love, Alisha Reneé comes to mind. Known to the Detroit, Chicago, and New York underground as BLUE (for her natural blue eyes), this chocolate sister from Motor City will strum your emotional strings with her angelic voice. Starting out in her hometown Baptist church, Blue sang with a passion for pleasing the Lord and anyone else who wanted to listen. On a mission to win crowds with genuine talent instead of a contrived image, she made a pilgrimage to N.Y.C., where many have since dubbed her the next Billie Holiday. But she shuns the compliment: "I don't like when people compare me to Billie, or any other singer. I just want to make music for my God and my people."



"Phenomenal Man," from Blue's three-song demo, is a serenade laced with tame and tender lyrics ("Like no other man you take care of me / Don't need no medication / You're my pharmacy"). On the definitive "Special Kind of Love," her vocals are lifting, switching to a daring a cappella on the final, as-yet-untitled joint. Thanks to her strong presence, Blue has already attracted the attention of the Ummah (who plan to get busy on the production tip), D'Angelo (who will also make a beat contribution), and the Last Poets (with whom she has worked in the past). She also recorded a song with Shaquille O'Neal–"Just Be Good to Me"–that made the cut for his forthcoming album. At the moment, she's in search of a deal with a label that wants to see *true* Blue as well as green. All interested should give a shout to her manager, Cheryl Ames, at 212-862-2600.

Reading about underground talent may be the bomb, THE MUSIC EDGE is a nationwide service set up to give aspiring hip hop/R&B/reggae artists that low-cost push. Started by Patrice Lassiter in January 1996, Edge headquarters are located in the present-day black music mecca, Atlanta, Ga. Every month, a CD containing MCs, DJs, singers, and reggae artists is distributed to thousands of radio personalities, DJs, magazines, and other industry heads. So far, a few cats featured on the Edge have been picked up by labels or have received noticeable sales boosts. Alumni include Tony Mercedes from the Miami-based group Duice (remember their booty-bouncin' single "Dazzey Duks"?) and Florida crew O-Town Boyz (formerly O.S.O.K.), who were signed to Robbins Entertainment, which is distributed by BMG.

Along with national distribution, Edge provides clients with a few words in their newsletter, *The Edge Informer*, a biographical paper that lets listeners know what they're in for. If you want to get down with the Music Edge (bear in mind you'll need a couple of dollars), those in the southwest region should buzz Lassiter at 404-286-2574; Northeasterners should call Michelle Panton at 718-398-8095. They'll tell you how to get on; I'll let you know when you come up.

LUTHER VANDROSS 'YOUR SECRET LOVE'

EPIC



GUZMAN

What do you do to get into the Cupid groove? Dim the lights, pop the cork on the Chianti (or Dom P. if you're ghetto fabulous), and slip Luther into the CD player, of course. Like his previous 10 albums, Vandross's latest platinum-bound offering, *Your Secret Love*, should immediately be added to your cozying-up collection. As a matter of fact, toss out all those CDs that wreck your lovefest by juxtaposing ballad and bump-and-grind cuts. Then thank the Love Goddess that Luther proves he's still a master at setting the mood by adding even more lush love songs to his musical repertoire instead of "diversifying" with up-tempo tunes.

REVOLUTIONS IN EMOTIONAL SOUL

At the top of his game on the title track—an achingly beautiful ode to loving Mrs. Wrong—Luther also skillfully caresses a cover of Stevie Wonder's "Knocks Me off My Feet." A sexy duet with Lisa Fischer (his tourmate from the triumphant 1992 Power of Love tour), "Whether or Not the World Gets Better," adds more fuel to Luther's passionate fire. The only jagged edge on the album is a guest rap by Deidre "Spinderella" Roper (DJ/rapper of Salt-N-Pepa), which interrupts Luther's impassioned vocals on the cut "I Can't Wait No Longer (Let's Do This)." Fortunately, Spin's in-your-face riff is short and sweet—making Luther's hop onto the hip hop bandwagon forgivable.

Providing the Luther-fied chorus for all the cuts on *Your Secret Love* are the superstar's favorite backing vocalists, including Cissy Houston, Cindy Mizelle, and Brenda White-King. Luther has blended this latest ballad brew with longtime cohorts such as composer and multi-instrumentalist Marcus Miller, who wrote and coproduced "I Can't Wait" and cowrote and coproduced "Nobody to Love." Much thanks to Luther, the secret is out: Love may be like a roller coaster, but at least beautiful ballads make the ride a lot smoother. *Deborah Gregory*

UGK 'RIDIN' DIRTY'

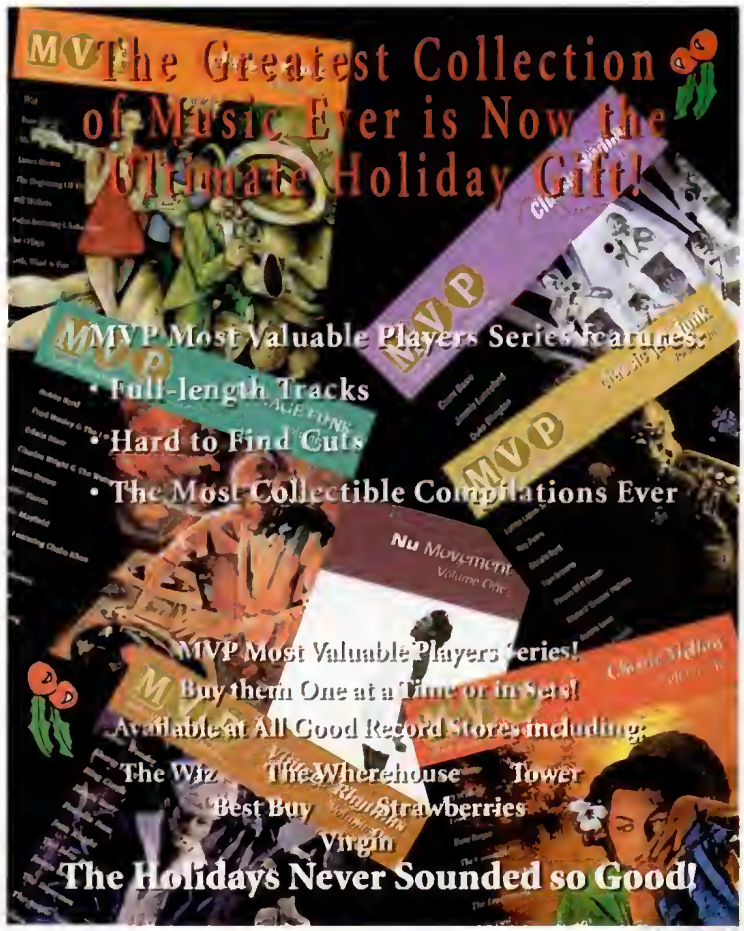
JIVE

Leanin' out the side of a playalisticadillac, polishing the barrel of a 12-gauge, and smokin' bails of dank, UGK (Underground Kings) go *Ridin' Dirty* over the southern fried funk familiarized by Eightball & MJG and fellow Texas outlaws the Geto Boys. Nuthin' new here, though a few standout tracks raise UGK above gangsta boredom. Producer Pimp C weaves gorgeous Isley vocals into the sorrowful, cocaine-slangin' blues "One Day." And on "Murder," Bun B gives new meaning to "internal rhyme": "Now I done whipped out my Pirelli," he raps. "Flyin' through your Pelle Pelle and some smelly red jelly is drippin' out your belly." Ouch. Not for the squeamish who asked mommy to cut the crusts off. *David Bry*



KEITH BAUGH







modern classics

KANGOL

REAL LIVE 'THE TURNAROUND'

PIRATE RECORDINGS/BIG BEAT/ATLANTIC


Larry-O, K-Def

An interesting thing has happened to hip hop over the past eighteen years or so. The art form has turned on its original self many times over, resisting at all costs the tag "party music." Of course, party music may not always be the *best* music, but it can be the most memorable.

Jersey-bred K-Def and Larry-O have finally finished their debut album, *The Turnaround: The Long Awaited Drama*, having been working in the rap game since '78. (Want proof? Check their sweatshirt-iron-on-ready monikers.) And they definitely don't make party music—though Wonder Mike, *the* Wonder Mike from the Sugar Hill Gang, is actually Larry-O's cuz.

Unfortunately, that's what Real Live need more of. Tracks like "The Turnaround" and "Iceberg Slick" aren't as tantalizingly smoky or sinister as the duo's acclaimed first single, "Real Live Sh*t." K-Def returns to an older school (circa 1987) for beats that could have been refreshing but, instead, take on a dull monotony. Now, on the flip side—as evidenced by the remix of "Real Live Sh*t," featuring Ghostface Killer, Cappadonna, Killa Sin, and Lord Tariq—the sound of *Turnaround* leaves plenty of room for successful remixes/posse cuts, which might mean that with a little more tinkering this album could be around for a while.

It's just that *The Turnaround*, while raw indeed, doesn't take many risks. Is it pure East Coast hardcore, à la G Rap? Yes, and for some that will be more than enough. But in the end, *The Turnaround* isn't a headbanger or an ass-shaker. And in hip hop, it's got to be one or the other.

Kierna Mayo Dawsey

MACK DIVA 'THE WITCHES OF BUSHWICK'

MADRINA/BLACKROCKCOALITION



Rising from N.Y.C.'s black alternative underground, Mack Diva, founded by lead guitarist/VIBE writer-at-large Greg Tate, have released what would be a completely innovative debut (recorded half in studio, half live in Belgium) if it were not buried underneath congested composition. Vocalists Soyini Assata, Misha Mack, and Kecia Elan create an eclectic fusion of jazz, blues, and folk styles reminiscent of Cassandra Wilson. Unfortunately, the arrangements on *Witches* fail to compliment these divas, pitting them against too many guitar solos. Though the first three cuts—the Billie Holiday remake "Gloomy Sunday," "Blessed" (featuring N.Y.C. poet Beans), and "Betty Mann"—are automatic rewinds with minimal production, sadly they just prepare you for an album that's a bit undone.

Sha-Kay

REVOLUTIONS EVOLUTIONS

112

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NIGHT BEAT
A CLUB LIST

DETROIT

Every night is a good night at **Club Network**. On Wednesdays the smell of BBQ is inescapable outside while inside, on the dance floor, acid jazz, hip hop and house keep the place movin'. Free is the word on Thursday nights: free admission, free soul food, plus karaoke, so you can take center stage and sing the classic jams you never thought you could (or should). Fridays, chill, relax and let Network's own in-house band, "Back to Back," wrap you up in cool jazz sounds, 7:30 p.m. until 11:30 p.m. Then the funk of R&B and hip hop gets the blood flowing and you moving. On Saturdays it's a different theme party every week, complete with it's own unique dress code. Be sure to call (313-963-2180) ahead to find out what you need to wear, because you won't get in if you don't look the part. Network is located at 1314 Broadway.... Once the home of an old bomb shelter, **St. Andrew's Hall** is now simply "da bomb," with the greatest dance parties and concerts around. St. Andrew's basement dancefloor, titled The Shelter, is well known for its dance parties, while its upstairs venue is a popular concert spot. Its stage has seen the likes of Bahamadia, the Fugees, and Goodie MOb. On Fridays it all comes together with "Three Floors of Fun." Hip hop dominates the main floor, upstairs is techno, while there is a hodgepodge of various sounds in the basement. On Wednesdays and Saturdays alternative music takes over the scene. Admission is $5 on Saturdays, $6 on Wednesdays, and $5 before 11 p.m. on Fridays.

LOS ANGELES

Ever wondered what it would be like to be in a James Bond movie? **Martini Lounge** is known for it's funky, James Bond-style decor. Its walls are covered with padded black and white rubber, while a bar made out of an old airplane wing makes your first drink there a memorable one. On Sundays DJ XL spins the freshest hip hop in town. Occasional live performances in the past have included LL Cool J, House of Pain and the Fugees. Come by on Saturdays for the best mix of hip hop, funk, R&B and '70s grooves pumped out through a state-of-the-art sound system. Wednesdays get down and work yourself into a sweat with reggae in the house. Admission is usually $5. Martini Lounge is located at 5657 Melrose Ave....Feel like a king at the **Palace** located at 1735 N. Vine Street. Every Thursday Groove Radio 103.1 brings in its DJs, who professionally spin a web of sounds including house, reggae, trip hop, trance, and techno, with even some disco thrown into the mix. On Fridays alternative, retro and disco take over, courtesy of KROQ. Be sure to stick around for contests with cash prizes. On Saturdays KIIS-FM churns out the best of house, old skool, retro and disco. Admission is usually around $10.

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WESTSIDE CONNECTION 'BOW DOWN'
PRIORITY



WC, Ice Cube, Mack 10

Whoever said gangsta rap is dead apparently didn't informed Ice Cube. As the central figure in this L.A. supermob, which also includes Cube's protégés Mack 10 and WC (of WC & the Maad Circle), the "Nigga Ya Love to Hate" is steadily becoming the Nigga Ya Hate to Love.

Though this album was completed long before Tupac's death, it's now hard to look at any hip hop—let alone West Coast rap—outside the context of that tragedy. People have been losing loved ones to gang-related violence long before 'Pac, and will continue to do so long after, which only renders the remorseless tone of *Bow Down* all the more tiresome. Unfortunately for hip hop fans with a conscience, Cube and his associates craft a boomin', buttery concoction—smoove-ass bass, eerily perilous grooves—that you just can't help swigging, despite the harsh aftertaste. These three shoot more gift than Santa Claus on speed.

But *Bow Down* provokes no debate, raises no controversy (unlike much of Cube's superb catalog), and offers no insight into the intricacies and brutality of gangbanging (as Cube did on *Lethal Injection*). Nor does Mack 10 illuminate the glorious soul of 'hood life like he did on his own album. In fact, the closest Westside Connection get to any issue is dissing the East Coast ("All the Critics in New York") and furthering a beef with Cypress Hill ("King of the Hill"). Sure, this is "Black America's CNN," but maybe the station needs a new program director.



Nonetheless, as a soundtrack for the gangstas—as opposed to the New York critics—*Bow Down* will no doubt be bouncin' every hooptie west of the Hudson. But when Cube says, "Gangsta rap'll never die / There's too much love," he knows that such love too often translates into dead black men. He should know just how thin the line is between love and hate.

Eric Berman

GHOSTFACE KILLAH 'IRONMAN'
RAZOR SHARP/EPIC

Following his Shao Lin brethren, the once mysterious clan member Ghostface Killah (a.k.a. Tony Starks) finally opens his own chamber with *Ironman*. Like his raw-vocaled counterpart Chef Raekwon, Ghostface bangs out sarcastic, street-camouflaged wildness. And leaves it up to the twisted mind of the RZA to cook up beats that take you back to the chills you got when listening to *Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)*.

Over the title track's threatening bass line, jingly beat, and 1930s gangster-style trumpet, Ghostface, Raekwon, and Cappadonna fuck up your head with rhymes like "One gallon of wildin' Park Hill profilin' / I'll cut your face a buck fifty sure / Why you smilin'?" On "Two Sixty"–which sounds like part two of Raekwon's "Spot Rusherz"–Rae and Ghost trade ideas for a robbery scheme.

Don't think, though, that *Ironman* is just 60 minutes of beef. Starks kept everyone in mind with songs like "Camay" (a Teddy Pendergrass–sampling joint for the ladies) and "Box in Hand," which takes it back to the park jams with the hook: "If you're walking down the street with your box in your hand / And you're playing the music of the Wu-Tang Clan...." In "All That I Got Is You," featuring a low-key Mary J. Blige, Ghostface gives his mom a salute that damn near breaks you down in tears.

Snoop hit hard with the Dramatics; fittingly, Ghostface and Raekwon answer back with Philly soul legends the Delfonics on "Wu-Delfonics." "After the smoke is clear," they croon, "Delfonics and Wu-Tang still here." The Wu, of course, maintain raw rhyme tradition with Raekwon's rap, "My sun moves like a token truck / Speak in codes / Throw a fiend in a sleeper / Got beef with globe."

Considering the success of the five previous Wu-Tang projects, it might seem hard for the sixth to still make noise, but Ghostface screams. *Ironman* is proof of his matured lyrics and delivery and the Wu's strong family stand. If *Only Built 4 Cuban Linx...* had you open, prepare for another gaping wound.

The Blackspot

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Plum velvet pantsuit $1,170 by **Vivienne Westwood Men Collection** available at Saks Fifth Avenue, N.Y.C. and L.A., Untitled, N.Y.C., and Wilkes Bashford, San Francisco.

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DJ Spooky: Gray fleece Buechler shirt by **Mecca, U.S.A.** available at fine stores everywhere.

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Björk: Yellow quilted coat $350 by **W&LT** available at Barneys New York, N.Y.C. and Charivari, N.Y.C.

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Everything but the Girl. Ben Watt: Yellow ribbed sweater $120 by **Diesel** available at Diesel Stores, N.Y.C., Washington, D.C., and Boston, and Politics, L.A.; cotton indigo jean $110 by **A.P.C.** available through the A.P.C. catalog (for information, call 212-966-0069). Tracy Thorn: Red lycra jersey crossback taok witb navy trim $58 aod navy cotton/lycra catsuit $110, both by **tommy by Tommy Hilfiger** available at Dillard's, Macy's, and Bloomingdale's, nationwide.

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Goldie: Navy nylon overalls with red lining $118, by **Tommy Jeans** available at Macy's and Rich's.

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Claude "Fiddler" Williams: Blue plaid wool suit $850 and white button-down shirt $175, both by **Nicole Farhi** available at Charivari, N.Y.C., Fred Segal, Calif., and Moda, Pittsburgh. Sam Johnson: Grey suit with red pinstripe $1,505, white cotton button-down shirt $360 and stripe tie $130, all by **Yobji Yamamoto** available at Yohji Yamamoto, N.Y.C., Max Field's, L.A., and Magazine, Miami. Ahmad Alaadeeo: Grey suit $1,505 by **Yohji Yamamoto** available at Yohji Yamamoto, N.Y.C., Max Field's, L.A., and Magazine, Miami.

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Sonny Kenner: Black tuxedo $640 and white button-down shirt $165, both by **cK by Calvin Klein** available at Saks Fifth Avenue (select stores), Bloomingdale's (select stores), Macy's (select stores), and Nordstrom's (select stores). Right: Black suit $1,865, stripe tie $170, and white cotton button-down shirt $360, all by **Yohji Yamamoto** available at Yohji Yamamoto, N.Y.C., Max Field's, L.A., and Magazine, Miami.

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Navy blue single-breasted suit $1,410 and white button-down shirt $320, both by **Yobji Yamamoto** available at Yohji Yamamoto, N.Y.C., Max Field's, L.A., and Magazine, Miami.

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Bobby Watson Sr.: Burgundy single-breasted suit $870, fuchsia button-down shirt $130, both by **Ozwald Boateng** available at Saks Fifth Avenue, N.Y.C., and Traffic, L.A.

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Black V-neck sweater $165 and black-and-white-stripe sweater $200, both by **agnés b.** available at agnés b., nationwide.

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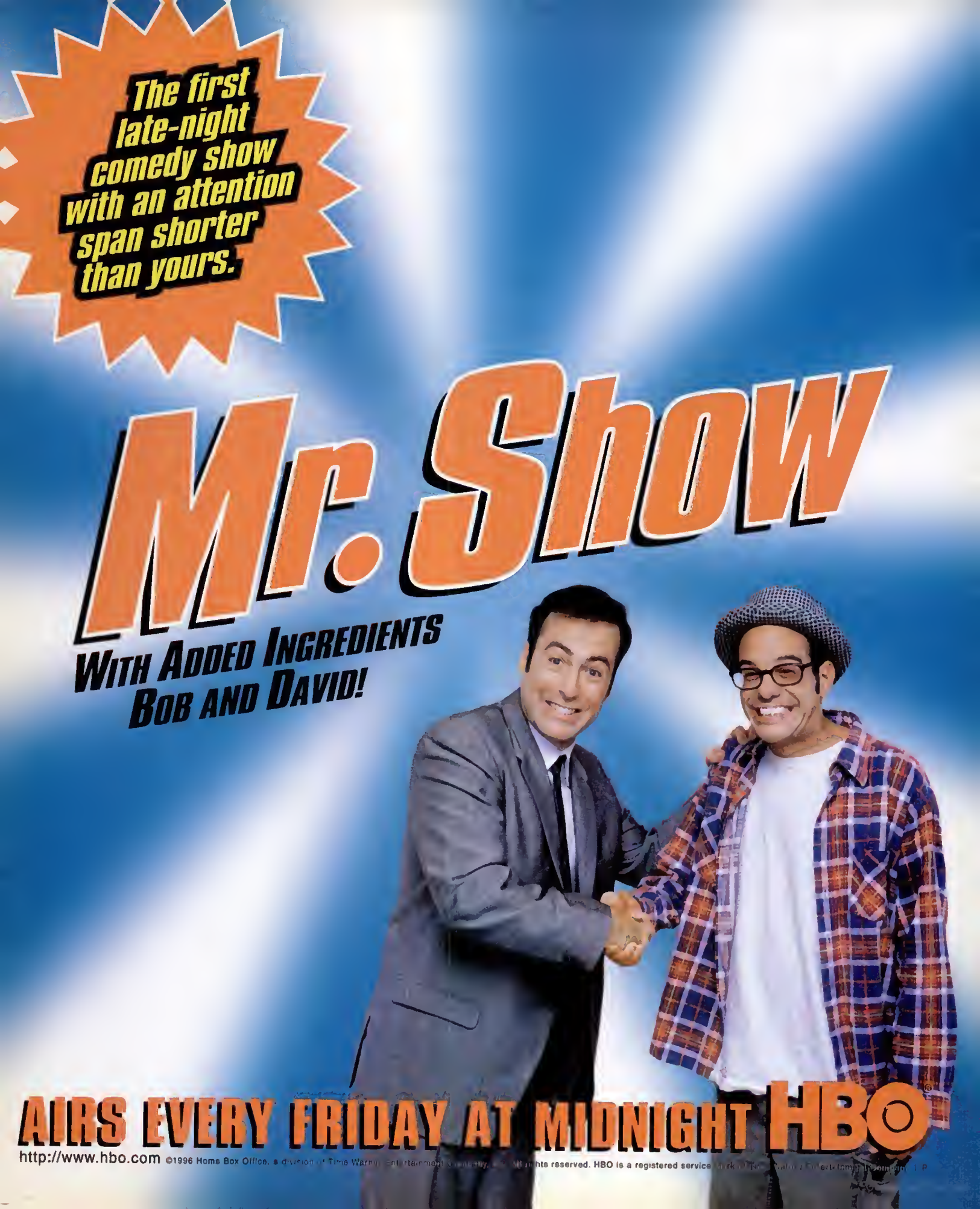
Clockwise: Black-and-white hypnotic print racerneck dress $295 by **cK by Calvin Klein** available at Macy's (select stores), Nordstrom's (select stores), and Bergdorf Goodman's. Black-and-white zebra print dress $295 by **agnés b.** available at agnés b., nationwide. Bobby Watson Sr.: Black single-breasted tuxedo $1,150 by **Paul Smith** available at Paul Smith, N.Y.C.; turquoise button-down shirt $130 by **Ozwald Boateng** available at Saks Fifth Aveoue, N.Y.C , and Traffic, L.A.

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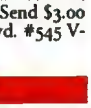
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2873	A Tribe Called Quest	3642	Dogg Pound	5521	LL Cool J	7981	S W V
2251	Aaliyah	3662	Domino	6253	M C. Lyte	7231	Sade
4251	Aaron Hall	3731	Dr Dre	2271	Mariah Carey	7251	Salt N Pepa
4692	Adina Howard	3211	Eazy E.	6271	Marky Mark	7224	Scarface
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2351	Bell Biv DeVoe	3842	Fugees	6384	Method Man	7421	Shai
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Othello on Broadway, 19



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In this day of rapper/actors, singer/songwriter/producers, and athlete/activists, Paul Robeson would have been the ultimate slasher. The athlete/scholar/singer/actor/political activist was born in 1898, in Princeton, N.J. The son of a runaway slave, Robeson became both an American hero and an American tragedy.

Before Bo Jackson, there was Paul Robeson. He was an All-American end at Rutgers College who also lettered in baseball, basketball, and track.

In 1919 Robeson was the valedictorian of his graduating class. The following year he went on to play professional football with the Akron Pros. He attended Columbia Law School in the off-season, using his football salary to pay for his tuition.

Unwilling to endure the racial prejudice he felt at his law firm, Robeson turned to singing and acting and became world renowned in both. In 1933 he created a stir in *The Emperor Jones*, the first film starring a black man with a white supporting cast. He went on to star in 11 motion pictures before abandoning his film career. Robeson was also the first black actor to play Othello on Broadway. The celebrated 1943 production ran 296 performances, a record for a Shakespeare play.

But it was his activism that most ennobled Robeson and ultimately brought him trouble. His admiration for Soviet communism (Russian was one of 20-odd languages he spoke) overshadowed his impassioned, lifelong denunciation of racial injustice. The government revoked his passport from 1950–1958, and his popularity and health began to deteriorate. He died virtually forgotten in 1976.

But perhaps Robeson's greatest performance came during the McCarthy hearings when asked why he didn't stay in the Soviet Union if he liked it so much. "Because my father was a slave," he said, "and my people died to build this country, and I am going to stay right here and be a part of it just like you. And no fascist-minded people will drive me from it. Is that clear?" *Eric Berman*

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